



History of navigation on the Yellowstone river
by John G MacDonald

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.
Montana State University
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HISTORY
of
NAVIGATION ON THE YELLOWSTONE RIVER

by

John G. MacDonald

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by

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B.A., Jamestown College, 1937

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

In the mass of literature connected with the fur trade and exploration and settlement of the region now comprising Montana, the Missouri River as a route and a means of travel has received ample recognition, but its great tributary, the Yellowstone, has fared less well. It is little realized that travel on the Yellowstone River, from the days of the fur-trader to the coming of the railroad, played a very significant part in the history of the region. The Yellowstone was important first in exploration, and then in the fur trade, and finally was the decisive factor in the ability of the United States Army to open up one of the last remaining areas in the Northwest for settlement and peaceful pursuits.

Though never rivaling in tonnage or number of boats the well-traveled Missouri River route to Fort Benton, the Yellowstone River nevertheless supported a burden of traffic that warrants recognition. To recount its story, with emphasis on the contribution which travel on its swift-flowing waters made towards the exploration and final settlement of a large segment of present Montana, is the purpose of this study.

A general history of the Yellowstone Valley has been written many times, and details of its geography well covered. It is proposed, in this paper, to deal only with those phases in which water transportation played a large part. A brief geographical description will be necessary, however.

The Yellowstone River has its source in the northwest part of Wyoming, then gets its main supply in Yellowstone Lake at approximately $110^{\circ} 30'$ west longitude and $44^{\circ} 30'$ north latitude. From the lake it runs almost due north through the famous grand canyon, and through other narrow gorges until its junction with the Shield's River, where it changes its course to the eastward, taking a general direction a little north of east until it receives the Powder River, when its course changes to almost due northeast and it enters the Missouri about three miles above old Fort Buford, just over the line in North Dakota.

The Yellowstone drainage area is 70,400 square miles and its length over 440 miles, with a maximum width of about 310 miles. The main tributaries are the Clark's Fork, Big Horn, Tongue, and Powder Rivers, all flowing from the South.

The valley of the Yellowstone where it opens out presents a lovely landscape of bottom-lands dotted with groves, gradually elevated benches well grassed and prettily wooded, reaching to the foothills, and for a background the silver-crested

summits of the Yellowstone (Absaroka) range.¹

The valley of the Yellowstone is nowhere very wide, varying from narrow canyons above and below the present Livingston to fertile valleys ten to fifteen miles wide.

With the exception of the five miles at the lower end, where the valleys of the Yellowstone and Missouri appear to blend into one, the river has no shifting bars, and for much of its course, especially before it receives the heavy load of silt from the Big Horn and Powder Rivers, it is a clear, swift-running mountain stream, over gravel bottom, and with no snags.² The current is normally more rapid than that of the Missouri, and the gradient more steep, averaging 3.5 feet per mile between Billings and the mouth, and a maximum of 7 feet per mile. The elevation of the river at Yellowstone Lake is 7,564 feet above sea level. At the mouth of the Big Horn it is 2,831 feet, at Glendive 2,070, whereas the elevation of the Missouri as far up as Fort Benton is only 2,815 feet.³

¹Hubert Howe Bancroft, History of Washington, Idaho and Montana, 1845-1889, Vol. XXXI, Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft, (San Francisco: The History Company, 1890), p. 595.

²United States House Executive Document #1, Part 2, "Survey of the Yellowstone River," Report of the Secretary of War, 46th Congress, 2nd Session, Vol. II, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1879), p. 1097.

³Michael A. Leeson, History of Montana, 1739-1885, (Chicago: Warner Beers & Company, 1885), p. 21.

There are only two major rapids between its mouth and what proved to be the head of steamboat navigation--a point just south of the present Billings. The Buffalo Rapids, about eight miles above Glendive, and Wolf Rapids, just below the mouth of the Powder River, have been mentioned in several survey reports.⁴

The word "Yellowstone" appears to have descended through two translations from a native tongue. The natural color which gave rise to the descriptive name might well have been that on the walls of the famous grand canyon of the Yellowstone, or even the very common yellowish color of the bluffs and rimrocks to be found almost anywhere along the lower course of the river.

The Indian name is reported to have been Mi-tsi-a-da-zi, or Rock Yellow River.⁵ The French called it either Roche Jaune or Pierre Jaune, which the English explorers and trappers translated as Yellow Rock or Yellow Stone.

David Thompson, British explorer and geographer, who was among the Mandan Indians from Dec. 29, 1797 until

⁴United States House Executive Document #256, The Yellowstone River, Wyoming, Montana, and North Dakota, 73rd Congress, 2nd Session, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1934), p. 135.

⁵An Illustrated History of the Yellowstone Valley, (Spokane: Western Historical Publishing Company), p. 252. No Author or Publication date given.

Jan. 10, 1798, estimated the latitude and longitude of the sources of the Yellowstone, based on information from the natives, with amazing accuracy. He used the name "Yellow Stone" in his journal and field notes.⁶

However, probably the first time the word "Yellow stone" appeared on an official document was on the map and in the report sent back from their winter camp among the Mandans by Lewis and Clark in 1805 to President Jefferson. This report was also based on information from the Indians.⁷

The Crow Indians also had another name for the river, calling it Elk River, because of the abundance of that type of animal ranging there.⁸

When the Crow tribe of Indians was first known to the whites, it occupied the country stretching from the North Platte to the Yellowstone, along the eastern base of the Rocky Mountains eastward to the mouth of the Yellowstone, and occasionally northward to the Musselshell. Several interesting theories, among them that given by Lieutenant

⁶ Elliott Goues, New Light on the Early History of the Greater Northwest, The Journals of David Thompson and Alexander Henry, Three Volumes, (New York: Francis P. Harper, 1897), Vol. I, p. 302.

⁷ An Illustrated History, p. 251, and Hiram Martin Chittenden, Yellowstone Park, (Cincinnati: The Robert Clark Company, 1900), p. 1.

⁸ Chittenden, Yellowstone Park, p. 3.

Bradley in his journal,⁹ are advanced concerning the possible earlier Southern origin of this tribe. This has been hinted because of some physical characteristics, and tribal traditions. Bradley mentions the possibility of their place or origin being as far away as the Gulf of Mexico, or the Atlantic coast in Georgia or South Carolina, with intermediate stops along the Kansas River.

The Indians used boats very little, with the exception of the famous bull boat, and that was used usually for ferrying across streams, for their travel routes in the Yellowstone region were more often North and South. The Crows were indeed fortunate to live in the Yellowstone and Big Horn valleys, where buffalo roamed continuously because of winter range, and where other game was plentiful, and where they had no need to travel very far. It is no wonder they fought bitterly against the pressure of the Sioux tribes, which were being pushed westward by the advancing white frontiers, and leagued with the white man's soldiers in the war against the Sioux. The Crow nation had been traditionally considered to be friendly to the whites, though not

⁹Lieutenant James H. Bradley, "Journal," Contributions to the Historical Society of Montana, (Helena, Montana: State Publishing Company, 1896), Vol. II, p. 177. This series, in ten volumes, to date, has been printed by different publishers at intervals from 1876 to 1941, and will hereafter be referred to simply as Montana Contributions.

above horse-stealing raids or an occasional killing, and so they remained during the course of the nineteenth century. Horse stealing was regarded as one of the most honorable achievements among the Crows, and they were occasionally cruel and treacherous, but on the whole were quite highly regarded by whites during the period of this history.

This early friendship, established by John Colter and the other trappers and traders who followed quickly on the heels of the Lewis and Clark expedition, directly influenced the course of travel into the upper Missouri region, and gave impetus to more travel on the Yellowstone River than the Missouri itself received for several years, because of the dreaded Blackfeet tribe. Colter directed the first American trappers and traders to the Yellowstone region, as we shall see, and returned several times with Manuel Lisa.

The earliest travel on the Yellowstone, before the coming of the white man, must have been almost entirely by means of the bull-boat, above-mentioned, with perhaps an occasional dug-out canoe, if the route of travel was in an east-west direction. The bull-boat of the Indian was a small tub-like affair made of one or more buffalo hides stretched over a willow frame, and caulked with grease and tallow. It could be steered erratically by means of paddles and was a frail and troublesome craft, having to be removed

FIGURE I

AN INDIAN BULL-BOAT

(From a photo in Montana Historical Society Collection). See appendix.

from the water and re-caulked frequently, but the fur-traders later made quite large and useful bull-boats for floating hides down-river when no other means were available.

The Yellowstone River saw a variety of craft in use on its waters. Following the bull-boat came the dug-out canoe, the pirogue, the keel-boat, the mackinaw, and finally the steamboat. These will be described in greater detail in later chapters as they appeared on the scene.

CHAPTER II

EARLY EXPLORERS AND FUR TRADERS ON THE YELLOWSTONE

The question of who were the first white men to visit the Yellowstone River region is still one of considerable controversy. There is always the very remote possibility that the far-traveling Spaniards, following the eastern base of the Rocky Mountains, may have reached the region, but if so, their routes would have been in a north-south direction, and there exists at present no direct proof of their having extended so far.

Even the exact location of the route of the Verendrye brothers, Francois de la Verendrye, called Chevalier, and Joseph-Louis, in 1742-1743, is still subject to much debate, even though they left a journal of their travels,¹ and a lead marker found near present Pierre, South Dakota, February 16, 1913, which according to the journal, was deposited March 13th, 1743. It is this marker that confuses most theories as to their route, for, according to Doane Robinson and Charles E. DeLand, of the South Dakota Historical Society, if the farthest southwesterly point reached

¹"Journal of LaVerendrye, 1738-39," South Dakota Historical Collections, Vol. VII, (Pierre, S. Dak.: State Publishing Company, 1914), pp. 323-358. See also the Champlain Society edition of the Verendrye letters and journals.

by these intrepid French traders and explorers is assumed to be the Big Horn mountains, it is difficult to see how they could have traveled the distance between there and Pierre, South Dakota, according to the time schedule of the journal.² The DeLand view, then, is that the Black Hills were the mountains seen by the Verendrye brothers.

The other, and more widely accepted view, is that the Verendryes traveled in a more southwesterly direction from the Mandan villages on the Missouri, and in January of 1743 were along the eastern slopes of the Big Horn mountains. There their Indian companions became frightened, and the whole party beat a retreat to the eastward, probably skirting the Black Hills on the north along the Belle Fourche River. Unfortunately, the Verendryes' instrument for measuring latitude had been broken, and little care was taken to give specific descriptions of the country traveled, so that the whole subject is still a matter of controversy. It is not the purpose of this report to settle that dispute, since the Verendryes traveled entirely by land, but they are mentioned simply as white men who quite probably were the first in the Yellowstone region.

French fur-traders from the lower Mississippi and

²Charles E. DeLand, "The Verendrye Explorations and Discoveries," South Dakota Historical Collections, Vol. VII, (Pierre: State Publishing Company, 1914), pp. 89-322.

Spaniards from New Mexico may have become familiar with the lower Yellowstone and its southern tributaries, although there is not definite proof of this.³

It is much more probable that the first white man to travel the waters of the Yellowstone River was Charles Le Rays, a French-Canadian, who was a prisoner of a group of Indians and forced to wander with them through this region during the winter of 1802-03. LeRaye left an account of his wanderings⁴ and, according to it, his party reached the Yellowstone (which he called the Jaun) on July 15th, 1802, at a point the writer estimated to be about one hundred miles above its mouth. The party turned southward, wandered in the Big Horn region, met Crow Indians, and camped on the Big Horn River on the night of October 5th, 1802. There the men built bull-boats and proceeded in them to the mouth of the river, which they reached on the 11th, and from whence they proceeded up the Yellowstone. "The river is rapid, but has no obstruction. The ice now began to float, which rendered

³Harrison Clifford Dale, The Ashley-Smith Explorations and the Discovery of a Central Route to the Pacific 1822-1829, (Glendale, Calif.: Arthur H. Clark Company, 1941), p. 25.

⁴Charles LeRaye, "The Journal of Charles LeRaye," South Dakota Historical Collections, edited by Doane Robinson from the journal published and translated in Boston, 1812, by Jervasse Cutler, (Sioux Falls, S. Dak.: Press of Mark D. Scott, 1908), Vol. IV, pp. 150-180.

our navigation dangerous in such slight vessels."⁵

The party camped for the winter with some Crow Indians somewhere on the present Stillwater River. When the weather again became mild they moved on up that stream, and on the 12th of April, after traveling overland in a north-easterly direction, LeRaye reported they were back on the Powder River. By the 18th of April they were on the Knife River, in present North Dakota.⁶ LeRaye escaped from the Indians April 26, 1804, but his wanderings apparently had little or no effect on later trade or trips to the region.

Another fur-trader, who preceded Captain Clark down the Yellowstone Valley by one year, was Antoine Larocque, a French-Canadian who had come by way of the Mandans as a representative of the Northwest Company of Canada. He was, according to his own record,⁷ heading for the Yellowstone River from the Big Horn region on Tuesday, September 10, 1805.

⁵Ibid.; p. 175.

⁶Loc. cit.

⁷Francois Antoine Larocque, "The Journal of Francois Antoine Larocque from the Assiniboine River to the Yellowstone--1805," edited by Laurence J. Burpee, Canadian Archives, Report, 1911. The edition here used was an English translation by Ruth Hazlett, published in The Frontier; (Missoula, Montana: State University, 1934), Vol. XIV, pp. 241-247, 332-339; Vol. XV, pp. 67-75; and reprinted as Sources of Northwest History, No. 20, Missoula, Montana.

The camp was raised at nine o'clock and we turned in the direction of the northwest toward the Yellowstone river where we arrived at two o'clock in the afternoon. . . The current of this beautiful and great river is very great; the savages say that there are not any falls there.⁸

This point was somewhere on the Yellowstone between Pryor Creek and the Clark's Fork. Here Larocque decided to return to the Northeast, and told the Indians he would be back to trade the next year. Since he traveled on foot and on horseback he contributed nothing to the history of navigation on the Yellowstone, but showed that the region was known before Clark's journey in 1806.

The famous Lewis and Clark expedition to the Pacific Coast first sighted the Yellowstone on Thursday, April 25th, 1805.

The Indians inform that the Yellowstone River is navigable for perogues and canoes nearly to its source in the Rocky Mountains, and that in its course near these mountains it passes within less than half a day's march of a navigable part of the Missouri.⁹

The party camped near the mouth of the Yellowstone, but after a few surveys had been made a short distance up that river, the expedition continued on up the Missouri.

The following year, after a winter spent on the

⁸Ibid., p. 20.

⁹Original Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition 1804-1806; edited by Reuben Gold Thwaites, in seven volumes and Atlas; (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1905), Vol. I, Part 2, p. 339.

Pacific coast, the successful explorers were returning, and at Traveler's Rest, on Lolo Creek, in the beautiful Bitterroot Valley of Montana, Tuesday, July 1st, 1806, Lewis and Clark made plans for their separation. Captain Lewis and party were to go by the most direct route to the falls of the Missouri, and on an exploratory side trip up the Marias River. The remainder of the men, according to Lewis' journal of that date, were:

. . . to proceed with Capt. Clark to the head of Jefferson's River where we deposited sundry articles and left our canoes. from hence Sergt. Ordway with a party of 9 men are to descend the river with the canoes; Capt. C. with the remaining ten including Charbono and York will proceed to the Yellowstone river at its nearest approach to the three forks of the Missouri, here he will build a canoe and descend the Yellowstone river with Charbono the indian woman, his servant York and five others to the Missouri where should he arrive first he will await my arrival. Sergt. Pryor with two other men are to proceed with the horses by land to the Mandans.¹⁰

On July 3rd Captain Clark and his party separated from Lewis and turned up the Bitterroot River, crossed over into what is now called the Big Hole, thence up the Wisdom or Big Hole River, and crosses another divide to what is now called Grasshopper Creek. Down this stream they went to its junction with the Jefferson, where they picked up the cached canoes and provisions and proceeded on down to

¹⁰Ibid., p. 176, V, 2.

the Three Forks. Here Sergeant Ordway left to proceed on down the Missouri with the canoes, portage around the falls, and meet Captain Lewis. Captain Clark, with a party that now consisted of, besides himself, "Sergt. Pryor, Jo. Shields, G. Shannon, W. Bratton, Labiech, Windsor, H. Hall, Gibson, the Interpreter Sharbono, Wife and child, York, 49 horses and a colt,"¹¹ crossed overland by a pass between the present Bozeman and Livingston, Montana, recommended by the Indian woman, and later to become famous as Bozeman Pass. Clark reached the "River Rochejhone" at about the present site of Livingston, on Tuesday, July 15th, 1806, at 2:00 P.M., and noted that it was "120 yards wide bold, rapid and deep."¹²

The party was disappointed in not finding sufficiently large timber for dug-out canoes, and was forced to continue downstream on foot and horseback. Clark recorded in his journal for July 15th:

The Roche passes out of a high rugged mountain covered with snow. The bottoms are narrow within the mountains but wider in the Vally below. . . . I can see no timber Sufficient large for a Canoe which will carry more than 3 men and such a one would be too small to answer my purpose.¹³

By the 17th of July, passing near the present Big

¹¹Ibid., V, 2, p. 259.

¹²Ibid., V, 2, p. 264.

¹³Ibid., V, 2, p. 265.

Timber, Montana, they had still not found anything suitable for their needs.

On the 18th, just above the mouth of what Clark called the Rosebud River, but which is now known as the Stillwater, Gibson snagged his thigh. His painful travel made it even more imperative that timber for canoes be found.

Finally, about sixteen and one-half miles below the Stillwater, at a place with high bluffs on the south, wide bottoms on the north, where the river makes a northward bend, Clark camped.¹⁴ Although the Cottonwood timber there was larger than above, it would still make only small dug-out canoes. However, after sending a scouting party downstream for about twelve miles, and finding none larger, Clark:

. . . determined to have two canoes made out of the largest of those trees and lash them together which will cause them to be sturdy and fully sufficient to take my small party & Self with what little baggage we have down this river.¹⁵

He had handles put in three axes, and put three men to work while the remainder prepared dried meat, repaired their sadly worn clothing, and allowed the horses to rest.

¹⁴This point is just southwest of present Park City, Montana. The highway information marker is deceptive, giving the impression that the point is East of Park City, and should be changed.

¹⁵Thwaites edition, Journals, V, 2, p. 278.

On the morning of July 21st, half their horses were missing, and after a thorough search, they concluded that Indians had made off with them. By evening one canoe was almost ready, and by noon on Wednesday, July 23rd, both were finished. Oars and poles were prepared, and Sergeant Pryor, G. Shannon, and Windsor got instructions for taking the remaining horses overland to the Mandan villages. The two canoes were put in the water, lashed together, and everything was prepared for departure in the morning.

The canoes were twenty-eight feet long, sixteen or eighteen inches deep, and from sixteen to twenty-four inches wide.¹⁶

The next morning the first recorded downstream navigation of the Yellowstone River began. The start was not auspicious, for at a riffle about one mile above the entrance of the Clark's Fork (which Clark mistakenly first called the Big Horn and later named after himself), the canoes took on water, and had to be beached to dry out. The junction of the Clark's Fork and Yellowstone, Clark decided, would make an ideal spot for an establishment, for "here the beaver country begins."¹⁷

¹⁶Ibid., V, 2, p. 281.

¹⁷Ibid., V, 2, p. 288.

Pryor had been having difficulty with the horses, so one more man was assigned to him. His party was ferried across to the south side of the river just below the Clark's Fork, and he and his men were not seen again until the main group was well below the mouth of the Yellowstone.

The navigators proceeded on very easily now, making seventy and eighty miles a day. On the 25th of July Clark noted and investigated the well-known landmark he named Pompey's Tower, and now known as Pompey's Pillar.

At the Big Horn River, on the 26th, Clark walked up its valley for a few miles. He noted in his journal:

This river (Big Horn) is said to be navigable a long way for perogues without falls and waters a fine rich open country.¹⁸

Sunday and Monday, the 27th and 28th, were spent gliding on down, making good time, but Clark was disappointed in that he saw no Crow Indians. He had a long speech all prepared, if he should meet any. The only discomfort seemed to be from want of clothing, which was falling off them from wear. Elk, buffalo, and beaver were plentiful.

Below the Tongue River, which was passed July 29th, Clark noted the changing character of the river--wider, with more sand and gravel bars than above. Twelve miles below they ran into shoals, or rapids. There was a succession of

¹⁸Ibid., V, 2, p. 298.

them for about six miles, the lowest one being the worst, and over which they lowered the canoes by hand.

This is by far the worst place which I have seen on this river from the Rocky mountains to this place. . . . a Perogue or large canoe would with Safty pass through the worst of those Shoals, which I call the Buffalow Shoals.¹⁹

Twenty miles below more were passed, which Clark called Bear Rapids. Still further on down, above the present Glendive, Montana, another rapid-water stretch was passed. This he named Wolf Rapid, and all three have kept this nomenclature.

Now the navigational hazards began to be of a more unique type. Below Glendive immense herds of buffalo were crossing the river, forcing frequent stops, and slowing their pace. Rains and "musquetors" were also added to their troubles, until, as the junction approached, little rest from the insects was had by any in the party, day or night.

At 8:00 A.M., Tuesday, August 3rd, the party arrived at the junction of the Yellowstone with the Missouri, and camped at a point between the two rivers. Clark estimated he had traveled 636 miles on the Yellowstone,

. . . in 2 Small Canoes lashed together in which I had the following Persons. John Shields, George Gibson, William Bratten, W. Labeech, Tous. Shabono his wife & child & my man York. The Rochejhone or

¹⁹Ibid., v, 2, pp. 308-9.

Yellow Stone river is large and navigable with but few obstructions quite into the rocky Mountains.²⁰

The mosquitoes were so troublesome that Clark left a note on a stick for Lewis, and moved on downstream.

One other short voyage down the Yellowstone, in a different type of craft, should be mentioned before we leave the Lewis and Clark Expedition. Sergeant Pryor, Shanon, Hall, and Windsor, the remainder of the horses having been also stolen by Indians, hiked overland to the Yellowstone, which they struck at about Pompey's Pillar. There they killed a buffalo, and proceeded to make a bull-boat. The description in the Clark journal of the process is worth repeating here.

. . . 2 sticks of 1-1/4 inch diameter is tied together so as to form a round hoop of the size you wish the canoe, or as large as the Skin will allow to cover, two of those hoops are made for the top or brim and the other for the bottom the deapth you wish the canoe, then Sticks of the same size are crossed at right angles and fastened with a throng to each hoop and also where each Stick crosses each other. then the Skin when green is drawn tight over this fraim and fastened with throng to the brim or outer hoop so as to form a perfect bason. One of these canoes will carry 6 or 8 men and their loads.²¹

The four men, on completing their bull-boat, had then floated, easily and swiftly in their rude craft, without

²⁰Ibid., V, 2, p. 319.

²¹Ibid., V, 2, p. 326.

incident, on down the Yellowstone, onto the Missouri, until catching up with Clark, a few days before Lewis and party also appeared.

As Lewis and Clark left the upper Missouri country traders and trappers were already moving in. Nearing the Mandan forts, about 60 miles above Bismarck, North Dakota, Clark wrote:

I observed a canoe near the shore. I directed the canoes to land here I found two men from the illinoies Jos. Dixon and (blank) Hancock those men are on a trapping expedition up the River Rochejhone.²²

The two men returned to the Mandan villages with the party. One of the men of the expedition, John Colter, lured by the prospect of engaging in the fur trade in the mountain region he had just left, asked to be released. Though sorry to lose him, Clark, in a journal entry for August 16, said:

Colter one of our men expressed a desire to join some trappers who offered to become shearers with (him) and furnish traps etc. the offer (was) a very advantageous one to him his services could be dispensed with from this down and as we were disposed to be of service to any one of our party who had performed their duty as well as Colter had done, we agreed to allow him the privilege provided no one of the party would ask or expect a similar permission. . . . We gave Jo Colter Some Small articles which we did not want and some powder & lead.²³

²²Ibid., V, 2, p. 329. Thwaites reports another memorandum among the Lewis and Clark papers spells the names of these men as Joseph Dickson and Forrest Hancock.

²³Ibid., V, 2, pp. 341-342.

Off went this intrepid and lonely wanderer back into the beautiful but dangerous Yellowstone country, when almost within sight of civilization after a trek to the Pacific Coast and back. The story of John Colter's adventures and wanderings and narrow escapes never fails to thrill. Here was a pure example of the mountain man. Sometimes in the company of Dixon and Handcock, later with John Potts, but more often alone, in a canoe or on his own two feet with a heavy pack on his back and rifle in hand, he crossed and recrossed all the Yellowstone and upper Missouri region, visiting Indian tribes, trading for furs or urging the Indians to come to the fort at the mouth of the Big Horn. He engaged in Indian battles, became familiar with at least some of the phenomena in and around the present Yellowstone Park, and most thrilling of all, escaped from a band of Blackfeet who had killed Potts and captured him near the Three Forks of the Missouri, in a spine-chilling foot race for his life. Then, after hiding until dark under a pile of driftwood in the river, with only his nose above water, he made his way, naked, footsore, unarmed, probably traveling only at night, the 250 or more miles to the little post on the Big Horn. There he arrived after seven days, having had nothing to eat but a few roots, and scarcely recognizable to the men at the fort.

Colter himself left no known written record of his

travels and experiences, but several accounts have been interestingly written by men who talked or traveled with him. They differ in some details, being second-hand reports, but the Bradbury account is usually considered the most reliable.²⁴

The exact route of Colter and Dixon and Hancock in the fall of 1806 is not known, though they must have gone into the Yellowstone region, and probably by canoe. Colter had been with Captain Lewis and party on the Missouri on the return trip of the expedition, but a healthy respect for the Blackfeet Indians, if nothing else, would have sent him up the Yellowstone.

The three men wintered in the region, and certain it was that in the spring of 1807, John Colter, with his canoe loaded with furs, was gliding down the Yellowstone and into the Missouri, headed once for St. Louis, two thousand miles away, and civilization. Perhaps he had even built himself a pirogue, two or more canoes lashed together, floored over, and built up at the sides, but since records indi-

²⁴John Bradbury, Travels in the Interior of America In the Years 1809, 1810, 1811, edited by R. G. Thwaites, (Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Co., 1904); H. M. Brackenridge, Journal of a Voyage up the River Missouri, (Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Co., 1904); also retold by Hiram Martin Chittenden, The American Fur Trade of the Far West, (New York: Francis P. Harper, 1902); Merrill D. Beal, The Story of Man in Yellowstone (Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1949), also contains good material on Colter's route, pp. 24-58 and Appendix.

cate he traveled alone, it was more likely by dug-out canoe.

Once again, however, the lure of the mountains was too strong for Colter. Somewhere along the Missouri, near the mouth of the Platte River, he met Manuel Lisa and party on the way upstream.

Manuel Lisa was a young man of Spanish descent who had arrived at St. Louis about 1790, and by 1800 was already well established in the fur trade. His business ability, initiative, and unusual facility in dealing with the Indians marked him as one of the great figures in the fur trade of the far west. Lisa was quick to understand the importance of the information brought back by Lewis and Clark in 1806, and he soon formed an association with William Morrison and Pierre Menard to tap the trade of tribes in the upper rivers. Their expedition left St. Louis in the spring of 1807, and was this party that met John Colter near the mouth of the Platte.

This was a fortunate meeting for Lisa, for here was an experienced guide, acquainted with the best beaver areas and with the Crow Indians, and one who was, without too great difficulty, persuaded to go back up-river.

No first-hand account of Lisa's 1807 trip is known, but the traditional means of reaching the upper river was by keel-boat, and Lisa must have had at least one. The keel-boat was often sixty to seventy-five feet long with a beam

of fifteen to eighteen feet and a draft of three to four feet.

Rising from the deck some four or five feet was the cargo box, cut off at each end about twelve feet shorter than the boat. This part of the boat, as the name implies, was generally used for freight, but was occasionally fitted up with state-rooms when used for passengers only. The boat was built on thorough principles of shipcraft and was a strong, substantial vessel.²⁵

The keelboat was capable of being propelled by cordelle, or rope, which was pulled by the miserable but indefatigable French-Canadian voyageurs, now wading along treacherous banks, now through willow thickets and clouds of mosquitoes, over snags and fallen trees, through heat or cold, making perhaps, if lucky, twelve to fifteen miles per day. To the amazement and disgust of Americans, who seldom stuck very long to this type of work, the voyageurs could wind up such a day with a meal of sometimes little more than dried corn, dance wildly around the evening fire to the tune of a fiddle, turn in on the frequently damp and cold ground, and continue the same, day after day.

If the water was not too deep, the keelboat was often pushed along by poles. The men would place one end of the pole on the bottom, the other against their shoulder, then, beginning at the front of the boat, they would walk toward

²⁵Chittenden, American Fur Trade, Vol. I, p. 33.

the rear along a little narrow walk, extending the length of the boat on both sides. At the stern they would pick up their pole, return to the bow, and repeat the process.

The following is a description of a keelboat as seen in 1823, which could not have differed materially from those of *Manual Lisa*, which were the first seen on the Yellowstone, in 1807:

At the wharf (St. Louis) lay two large keelboats, the Rocky Mountains and the Yellowstone Packet, very much alike. Each was about fifty feet long by fifteen feet beam, with sharp bow and stern, a mast and sails. The hull was decked over, forming a compartment about five or six feet deep, where supplies were stored. At the bow was a small cannon. Amidships was the cabin, and on each side, extending the length of the boat, was a narrow walk, or *passe-avant*, along which the men could walk while poling the vessel through shallow water.²⁶

Occasionally, when wind and current were right, the keelboat resorted to sails, for it was usually a well-built vessel. It had a carrying capacity of ten to twenty tons. Its draft was about thirty inches when light, and could carry a crew of from twenty to forty men. These craft were built chiefly in Pittsburgh, and taken down the Ohio to St. Louis. The cost was usually from \$2000. to \$3000. Being slow and expensive, only the larger fur companies could afford to purchase, outfit, and send them up-river.²⁷

²⁶ P. E. Chappell, "A History of the Missouri River," Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society, Vol. IX, pp. 271-72.

²⁷ Montana Contributions, Vol. X, p. 264, citing Chappell, "A History of the Missouri River."

FIGURE II

AN ARTIST'S SKETCH OF THE KEEL BOAT

(From Chappell, "History of the Missouri River,"

P. 261). See appendix.

Manuel Lisa and party, now including John Colter, reached the mouth of the Big Horn River on the Yellowstone late in the season, November 21, 1807, and so lost out on the fall trapping. Quarters and a trading house were started, constituting the first buildings by white men in what is now Montana. Colter started out in the dead of winter on a trip of exploring and notifying Indians of the trading post. Although his route is uncertain, it was on this trip that he was credited with at least approaching parts of what is now Yellowstone Park, and noting some of the wonders of that region.

Manuel Lisa, with his keelboat, or boats, returned to St. Louis in the spring of 1808, leaving a small force at his post at the Big Horn, variously called Fort Lisa or Fort Manuel, but not to be confused with at least two other posts similarly named, on the Missouri, one of which was approximately at the point where the North Dakota, South Dakota state line now crosses the Missouri, and other near present Omaha.

Colter still did not return to St. Louis, but in the company of John Potts, who had been a member of the Lewis and Clark expedition, and who had come up-river again, evidently with Lisa, he trapped the headwaters of the Missouri, and it was probably during 1808 he had the race for his life near the Three Forks, and Potts lost his life.

Another lonesome and dreary winter was spent at the mouth of the Big Horn. The men probably occupied most of their time cutting fuel, getting in game, trapping whenever the weather permitted, and trading with Indian visitors to the fort, but we may assume that Colter, with his restless nature, spent no more time at the post than necessary.

In 1809, Manuel Lisa, having reorganized his business affairs, and having formed the Missouri Fur Company, with B. Wilkinson, Pierre Choteau, August P. Chouteau, Reuben Lewis, William Clark, Sylvestre Labbadie, Pierre Menard, William Morrison, and Andrew Henry as partners, projected another trip to the Rocky Mountains.

It was for this trip that Thomas James enlisted, and later recorded his experiences.²⁸ James was of Welsh descent, born in Maryland, 1782. His parents had moved west and stopped in Missouri in 1807. When he enlisted for the voyage up the Missouri, he was twenty-seven years of age. The book was written to his dictation in 1846, at Waterloo, Illinois, but was suppressed because of his "bitter prejudices and an unbridled tongue,"²⁹ in reference to men of the Missouri Fur Company, and especially Manuel Lisa, many

²⁸General Thomas James, Three Years Among the Indians and the Mexicans, edited by Walter B. Douglas, (Reprint, St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society, 1916).

²⁹Ibid., p. 8.

of whom or their descendents, were by then respected citizens of St. Louis. The reliability of his accusations is questionable. Certainly men like Manuel Lisa had their faults and enemies in the highly competitive Indian trade, but James is bitter at all times and against everyone. He is sometimes inaccurate as to dates, but he told his story interestingly.

James gives the size of the party as 350 men, but Lisa reported 172 men, nine barges (probably keelboats) and a canoe, an instance of the conflicting statements in the James account.³⁰ This group was made up of French voyageurs and American "engagees." Mr. Chouteau, Col. Menard, and Lisa were in charge. James was a steersman, or "captain," of one of the barges. His crew was all American. The party left St. Louis in June 1809, "and ascended the Missouri by rowing, pushing with poles, cordelling, or pulling with ropes, warping, and sailing."³¹ Many of the Americans deserted. They were not accustomed to the treatment boatmen got, according to the James account.

At the Mandan villages James reported the Company was refusing to carry out its contract, and he and some other malcontents, meeting John Colter, made a deal for some traps on their own. James and two others, Miller and McDaniels,

³⁰Ibid., p. 17.

³¹Ibid., p. 18.

made plans to go to the forks of the Missouri, with Colter as guide. The group started out overland towards Fort Lisa on the Big Horn, but were forced by winter weather into camp. They later became lost for a time, suffered severely from snow-blindness, but in February of 1810 finally reached the Yellowstone and found Col. Menard in charge at the post.

James left the Big Horn for the Three Forks area with thirty-two men, French and American, with Colter still as a guide, and again suffered extreme hardships and snow-blindness, but on April 3rd, 1810, they had reached their destination and had begun the post near the present Three Forks, Montana, that was to have a very short life because of the constant threat of the deadly Blackfeet tribe.

John Colter, after two more narrow escapes in this same area where he made his famous race with death, finally decided he had better keep the oath he had twice made and twice broken--that if spared he would never return to this dangerous section--and, accordingly, once more took his canoe down the Yellowstone, into the Missouri, and, this time, on to St. Louis.

This man came to St. Louis in May, 1810, in a small canoe, from the headwaters of the Missouri, a distance of 3000 miles which he traversed in 30 days.³²

³²Bradbury, op. cit., p. 17.

There John Colter married, and took up land along the Missouri above St. Louis. Here he was seen, again longingly considering joining the Hunt Astoria expedition in 1811, but refraining because of his recent marriage, and here, according to St. Louis court records, John Colter died, in 1813, of jaundice, and in bed.³³

The others at the Three Forks of the Missouri that spring of 1810 also grew discouraged, and prepared to leave. Colonel Menard, James, and party, deserting the profitable but deadly region, crossed over the Yellowstone, and at Twenty-five Yard Creek (Shields' River) they made three canoes of buffalo bull's skin, stretched over a frame. Nine of the men, according to James, went down by canoe, with the traps and furs. In two days they reached the Clark's Fork, where they met a party from the fort and continued on down to Manuel's Post together.

We remained here several days, repairing a keelboat left by Manuel two years before, which we loaded with the goods from the canoes, and then recommenced our descent of the Yellowstone with the canoes and the two boats.³⁴

During this year of 1810, Manuel Lisa had again made the long, arduous, and dangerous journey by keelboat upriver

³³Chittenden, American Fur Trade, Vol. II, p. 723, and Stallo Vinton, John Colter, (New York: Edward Eberstadt, 1926), pp. 104, 110.

³⁴James, op. cit., p. 83.

to the Big Horn, and returned again in the fall to St. Louis. In 1811 he again went up-river to the Fort Manuel Lisa that is believed to have been on the Missouri approximately at the North Dakota-South Dakota boundary. Every journey meant travel in a pirogue or flat-bottomed keelboat, manned with oars, pole, or cordelle, leaving St. Louis as soon as the ice was out of the river, and crawling along against the current, making perhaps ten or fifteen miles a day, if lucky. The Mandan villages were approximately 1500 miles from St. Louis, and Ft. Lisa on the Big Horn was 500 miles beyond that. Lisa alone must have made at least twelve trips,³⁵ although not all were to the Yellowstone.

The next year, 1812, for example, the Lisa expedition, except for small parties and couriers, did not go beyond the Ft. Lisa on the Missouri near the present North Dakota-South Dakota line. A clerk on that expedition, John C. Luttig, has left an interesting account of the trip upriver and the winter of 1812-13 at that post, with occasional mention of the Big Horn post.³⁶

friday the 11th (October, 1812) early rise, the parties prepared to start. . . Mr. Lorimier, and four for wind River (Big Horn, Mr. Lewis, two engages

³⁵Kathryn M. French, "Manual Lisa," South Dakota Historical Collection, Vol. IV, (Sioux Falls: Press of Mark

³⁶John C. Luttig, Journal of a Fur-Trading Expedition on the Upper Missouri, 1812-13, Edited by Stella M. Drumm, (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society, 1920).

and the trappers for the little Horn in all 18 men.³⁷

On Wednesday the 16th of December, 1812, messengers returned with news of the Big Horn region:

. . . which gave some Satisfaction from their quarters they had by hunting and trading 12 Packs of Beaver in Store, and had purchased ten horses for their Use.³⁸

The post at the mouth of the Big Horn was soon afterwards apparently abandoned, and perhaps had not even been used by the groups mentioned above by Luttig. The War of 1812, the increasing attacks of the Aricara Indians along the Missouri, and unsettled conditions in the trade caused the region to be deserted, at least by large groups with permanent establishments, until 1821, when Joshua Pilcher, who became President of the Missouri Fur Company on the death of Lisa, 1819, built a new post on the site of Lisa's fort on the Yellowstone, calling it Fort Benton.³⁹

In the summer of 1822, our company fitted out an expedition under the direction of Messrs. Immell and Jones, the object of which was to extend our business to the sources of the Missouri. . . . This party wintered on the Big Horn, at Fort Benton; a post established in the winter of 1821, for the trade of

³⁷ Ibid., p. 77.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 105.

³⁹ Merrill G. Burlingame, The Montana Frontier, (Helena: State Publishing Company, 1942), p. 49. This is not to be confused with the later Fort Benton on the Missouri.

the Crow Indians, and as a depot for a party of trappers.⁴⁰

There were some 180 adventurers in the party, and in the fall of 1822 some \$25,000 worth of furs were sent down the Yellowstone and Missouri to St. Louis.⁴¹ But in the spring of 1823, returning from trading in the Three Forks area, the party was ambushed near Pryor's Fork on the Yellowstone by Blackfeet Indians. Seven men were killed, and furs to the value of \$15,000 were lost. The remaining stock was floated downriver by canoe or bull-boat after the massacre, but this was a disastrous blow to the Missouri Fur Company. Pilcher tried once more, making a tour to the Northwest in 1828, into the region of the British traders, but on his return to St. Louis he gave up interest in the fur trade.

In the years 1819-20 the word Yellowstone became familiar to almost all American ears because it was the name applied to a famous and popular military expedition that had as its purpose the showing of the strong arm of United States government authority in the Northwest. The influence of the British, the disastrous fortunes of the Missouri Fur Company,

⁴⁰ Joshua Pilcher's answer to questions of a Senate committee, "The International Significance of the Jones and Immell Massacre and the Aricara Outbreak in 1823," A. P. Nasatir, Editor, Pacific Northwest Quarterly, Vol. XXX, 1939, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, p. 104.

⁴¹ Chittenden, American Fur Trade, Vol. I, p. 150.

and the desire for protection and extension of American trade made this an exceedingly popular move on the part of President Monroe. It was to be both a military and scientific expedition to the mouth of the Yellowstone River, and grandiose plans were made for its execution. However, its very magnitude seemed to have contributed to its defeat, and, due to cumbersomeness of equipment and forces, poor leadership, and an attempt to transport the huge expedition by means of steamboats, the whole expedition bogged down without having gained half the distance to its objective. A miserable winter was spent near Council Bluffs, and the expedition was abandoned the next spring.

Another military show of strength, this time aimed chiefly at the Assiniboine and Blackfeet tribes, also took the name of Yellowstone Expedition (1825), and was under the leadership of General Henry Atkinson of the army, and Major Benjamin O'Fallon, Indian agent. This expedition was well planned and executed, reaching the mouth of the Yellowstone on the 17th of August (having left Council Bluffs the 14th of May). Although no direct contact was made with the Blackfeet and Assiniboine, treaties were made with several other tribes along the Missouri, and the enterprise as a whole was considered a success. A unique feature of their transport was the use of keelboats which had, in addition to the usual equipment of sails, cordelles, and poles, a

set of paddle wheels which were hand-operated by the men in the boat. Although they had some trouble with the machinery, the scheme seemed to be fairly successful.

In 1823 the favorite location at the mouth of the Big Horn River was taken over by an expedition under the direction of Andrew Henry (the same Henry of the ill-fated Three Forks establishment, who had, in the meantime, made a name for himself in the fur trade at the headwaters of the Snake River of the Columbia watershed), and William H. Ashley, representing the Rocky Mountain Fur Company. Henry called his establishment on the Yellowstone the Big Horn Post. It was apparently abandoned, however, the next year.

Most of the activities of this Company were carried on to the South, on the headwaters of the Platte and the Snake Rivers, but frequently, following the well-known annual rendezvous of traders and trappers, they found it advantageous to transport their furs overland to the Wind River (upper Big Horn), down that river and the Big Horn, on down the Yellowstone, into the Missouri, and on to St. Louis.

In 1825 General Ashley loaded one hundred and twenty-five packs of beaver into bull-boats at the head of navigation on the Bighorn River.⁴²

⁴²Hiram Martin Chittenden, History of Early Steam-boat Navigation on the Missouri River, in two volumes, (New York: Francis P. Harper, 1903), p. 101.

These boats were considerably different from the Indian bull-boat, being commonly thirty feet long by twelve feet wide, and twenty inches deep. The cargo was nearly always furs, and rarely exceeded 6,000 pounds. The craft was handled by poles.

A "pack" of fur, according to Stella M. Drumm, of the Missouri Historical Society,⁴³ contained ten buffalo robes, or fourteen bear, sixty otter, eighty beaver, eighty raccoon, one hundred and twenty foxes, or six hundred muskrat skins. The business of preparing the skins, curing them properly, and pressing and packing them was one of the chief activities in the monotonous life of the river posts.⁴⁴

Dale, in his outstanding work on the Ashley-Smith expeditions, quotes from General Ashley's journal of August 7th, 1825:

There is little or no difficulty in the navigation of that river (Big Horn) from its mouth to Wind River Mountain. It may be ascended that far at a tolerable stage of water with a boat drawing three feet water. The Yellowstone river is a beautiful river to navigate. It has rapids extending from above Powder river for about fifty miles but I found about four feet water over the most.⁴⁵

Ashley descended the Yellowstone, and arrived at its

⁴³Note by Stella M. Drumm in Luttig, Journal, p. 74.

⁴⁴See Luttig, Journal, and James H. Chambers, "Original Journal of James H. Chambers, Fort Sarpy," Montana Contributions, pp. 100-187.

⁴⁵Dale, op. cit., p. 157.

mouth August 19th at noon, "with a hundred or more packs of beaver skins, valued at from forty to seventy-five thousand dollars."⁴⁶

James Beckwourth, a part negro trapper who had been adopted into the Crow tribe, who had spent much time with them, and occasionally served the various fur companies, mentions several such groups using the Big Horn and Yellowstone for this purpose, and he himself came into the region in that way.⁴⁷ Beckwourth is an extremely unreliable source, but even discounting much of what he gives himself credit for, he had an interesting and varied career. His book was dictated from memory later, 1854-55, and even its editor called him "a noted old liar."⁴⁸ His dates are inaccurate, and he credits for himself many deeds usually connected with another mulatto, Edward Rose, who also went native and was adopted into the Crow tribe.

Beckwourth, for example, gives himself credit for having built Ft. Cass for the American Fur Company, about two miles below the junction of the Big Horn with the Yellowstone, when actually it was Samuel Tullock who was in charge.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 158.

⁴⁷James P. Beckwourth, Life and Adventures of James P. Beckwourth, as recorded by T. D. Bonner, (New York: Harper Brothers, 1856).

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 7.

However, he was undoubtedly present, and his comments are therefore interesting:

During my visit to Ft. Union I engaged to build a fort for M'Kenzie to store his goods in safety at the mouth of the Big Horn River. . . Accordingly I repaired to the place to select a good site and commence operations. On arriving at the spot, I found the boats close by with supplies from down-river. . .

There were fifty men, who had arrived with the boats, hired to assist me in erecting the fort. The stipulated dimensions were one hundred and twenty yards for each front, the building to be a solid square, with a block house at opposite corners. The fort was erected of hewn logs planted perpendicularly in the ground; the walls were eighteen feet high. . .

When we had completed our building we unloaded the boats and commenced trading with the Indians During the winter we accumulated a large amount of peltry, which in the spring I sent down to Ft. Union in five Mackinaw boats, built by ourselves for the purpose.⁴⁹

The position of the men in this fort was very precarious. There were constant Indian raids by the Blackfeet and others despite the presence of the Crows. Beckwourth noted that the boats returned in July, manned by Canadians, and he returned to the Crow tribe, visiting the fort again in October, with three hundred lodges of the Indians. He said that in conversation with Mr. Tullock, the commandant of the fort, he learned that "they had been incessantly

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 181.

harrassed by the Blackfeet ever since our last visit."⁵⁰

Beckwourth said Tullock asked him to select a new site for the fort that would be a safer, and, after consultation with the chiefs, they agreed on the mouth of the Rosebud River, thirty miles lower. Beckwourth then "took a boat filled with goods, and twenty men, and dropped down the river until we came to a beautiful location for the new fort."⁵¹ He stated that he assisted in building the new post (Fort Van Buren), and then returned to the Crows, but he reported several other boat trips up and down the Yellowstone between Ft. Union and the Company posts.

Meanwhile, each year there was developing a considerable traffic in fur downstream from the upper Big Horn region, chiefly by bull-boat. Chittenden records a shipping bill of one Johnson Gardner on the bull-boat Antoine, bound for Fort Union, July 18, 1832, from the "Crossings of the Yellowstone,"⁵² which was probably near the mouth of the Big Horn, and also reports that in 1833 the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, under Captain Bonneville and Nathaniel J. Wyeth, "embarked all their furs, the product of a year's hunt, in bullboats on the Bighorn River, and together went downstream

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 251.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 251.

⁵²Chittenden, History of the Fur Trade, Vol. III, p. 945.

to the mouth of the Yellowstone."⁵³

Also in 1833 came Charles Larpenteur to the Yellowstone region by way of the Big Horn from the Green River rendezvous, with a small party and four cows, two bulls, and thirty packs of beaver, bound for Ft. Union. Larpenteur was a sensitive, educated man, and, somewhat like James, found much in the fur trade and its agents to criticize, but his written record of forty years in the fur trade⁵⁴ gives one of the most interesting and complete pictures of that period now available.

On the 10th of August, 1833, Larpenteur and party reached the Big Horn below the mountains, there built buffalo hide boats, and part of the group descended in them with the furs, while the remainder trudged overland with the cows and bulls.

Of Ft. Cass on the Yellowstone, where Mr. Tullock was in charge, Larpenteur wrote:

We learned that this was a very dangerous post; they had had some men killed by the Blackfeet, and were even afraid to go out to chop wood. This fort was situated about two miles below the mouth of the Horn.⁵⁵

⁵³Chittenden, Steamboating, p. 101.

⁵⁴Charles Larpenteur, Forty Years a Fur Trader on the Upper Missouri, based on Coues Edition, (Chicago: R.R. Donnelly and Sons Company, 1933), Historical introduction by M. M. Quaife.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 39.

The trip on down to the mouth of the Yellowstone was a pleasant one, according to Larpenteur, except for fear of Indians, "but we lived on the fat of the land as. . . the Yellowstone abounded with all kinds of game at that early period."⁵⁶ The cows added to good living, for their milk was much relished. Although they had to bind the feet of the cattle to protect their worn and tender hooves, the party arrived with what was probably the first "trail herd" into Montana at the mouth of the Yellowstone the 3rd of December.

Larpenteur, on his arrival at Ft. Union, was offered a job by the famous Kenneth McKenzie of the American Fur Company, then in charge of the post, and rapidly rose in the next few years from clerk to a position of considerable trust in the company's affairs up and down the Missouri and the Yellowstone.

Because of harassment by the Blackfeet and under pressure from the Crows, as mentioned by Beckwourth, Fort Cass was abandoned, and the new trading post for the Crows, called Fort Van Buren, was erected at the mouth of the Rosebud River in 1835. There must have been a steady traffic between it and Fort Union during the ensuing seven years it was in existence--travel by canoe, bull-boat, keelboat, and now

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 39.

and then the mackinaw type of boat for downstream travel was beginning to be used. There were thousands of dollars worth of supplies and trading goods to be hauled up stream, and more thousands of dollars worth of peltries to be floated down to Fort Union.

In May of 1842 Alexander Culbertson, then in charge of Fort Union, sent Larpenteur up to Fort Van Buren with a party of ten men to bring down the returns, and with instructions to build another post at Adams prairie, about twenty miles above by land, forty by water.

Now we will set fire to Fort Van Buren, according to instructions, and proceed to erect Fort Alexander which I named in honor of Mr. Alexander Culbertson.⁵⁷

Larpenteur did not stay at Alexander, but was ordered to return to Fort Union. However, he returned to the Yellowstone several times, and on some of those trips made use of water transportation.

In 1850 Fort Sarpy was built, also by the American Fur Company, on the north bank of the Yellowstone, a short distance below the mouth of the Rosebud, under direction of Alexander Culbertson, and named for a partner in the company, John B. Sarpy.

Among the assistants to Robert Meldrum, who was in

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 147.

charge at Fort Sarpy, was a James H. Chambers, who kept a diary for the period 1855-56,⁵⁸ but about whom little else is known.

"Fort Sarpy Journal" offers a valuable picture of the daily life of a fur trading post--often a monotonous life, often dissolute in the behavior of the white inhabitants--but of particular interest here because it contains frequent mention of water travel up and down the Yellowstone.

On Monday, January 8, 1855, the diary entry mentions the arrival of a boat (evidently of keelboat type) bringing a person called Ebey, intensely disliked by Chambers, to the post:

His wife & two brats were hauled up in the boat a good place in the boat was found for them to sleep in coffe & Bread furnished them three times a day whilst the poor white slaves that dragged the heavy boat had neither bread nor coffee nor a place to crawl for shelter, in case of rain during the night the Indians were snugly stowed away in the Barge & the poor devils of Whites laying out beneath canopy of heaven.⁵⁹

As the spring of 1855 approached, Chambers grew worried about getting the winter's supply of furs down to Fort Union, and set the men, Meldrum being frequently absent, to work on two boats in their spare time. One was a

⁵⁸Chambers, op. cit., pp. 100-187.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 105.

keelboat that needed repair, the other a mackinaw to be completely built. The labor involved, and means used are interesting enough to warrant recounting in Chamber's own words:

(March 1855)

Sat. 24--Commenced sawing side plank for Boat.

Thurs. 29--Sawed curbs for Boat very windy.

(April)

Fri. 6--A windy day sent for steering oar for keel boat got an excellent one.

Wed. 11 . . . having nothing for the men to do I set them to dressing plank for boat

Mon. 16--finished sawing laid bed for Boat

Tues. 17--Laid bottom of boat

(May)

Thurs. 3--Our Boats are all ready for caulking but I have not force enough to move the keel.

Tues. 8--Set some to pick Oakum Others preparing the Col. Vaughan keelboat for caulking

Wed. 9--Commenced caulking & find we have not Oakum to caulk her bottom. Making use of Bale cloths flour and sugar sacks and Lodge skins.

Fri. 11--She is well greased & I think By care & good management she will carry her Cargo safely down the Yellowstone prepared ways. . . got her in the water without difficulty.

Sat. 12--Commenced caulking the new Boat.

Mon. 14--Caulked and launched the new boat river rising (Meldrum had returned)

Sat. 19--Loaded up the Boats fired the old Fort & left 1 p.m. run against a strong head wind passed all the Rapids & camped at the head of the Big hill

rained & blowed all night.⁶⁰

The party reached the mouth of the Yellowstone on Friday, May 25th, and took the boats up to Fort Union.

Apparently, the first Fort Sarpy lasted only until May of 1855. The Indian Agent for the Crows, A. J. Vaughan, parts of whose reports are also printed as reference notes to the Fort Sarpy Journal by the Montana Historical Society,⁶¹ corroborates Chambers' statement that old Fort Sarpy was fired May 19, 1855.

Indian Agent Vaughan also reported several trips up to the post. On July 18, 1854, he left Fort Union in a keelboat loaded with government goods and those of the fur company on a journey up the Yellowstone to Fort Sarpy, where they arrived August 15th, a good indication of the slowness of this method of transportation.⁶²

Vaughan's report of September 12th, 1855, stated:

On the 23rd of August, a mackinaw boat was started from Fort Union with the usual outfit of trade for the ensuing season at the Crow post.⁶³

It had only proceeded a short distance up the Yellowstone River when attacked by Sioux, and it was returned to

⁶⁰Ibid., pp. 118-126.

⁶¹Montana Contributions, X, pp. 282-283.

⁶²Ibid., p. 282.

⁶³Ibid., p. 283.

the fort. Vaughan's reports indicate that no annuity goods went upriver for 1855, 1856, or 1857, due to trouble from the Sioux.

A. H. Redfield, the Agent succeeding Vaughn, in his report of 1858, told of a trip up the Yellowstone in a fur company boat with the annuities for the years 1857, 1858 to distribute to the Crows. That this craft was of the keel-boat type is indicated by the fact that Redfield noted that a Negro, Mose, was drowned in the river on this trip while cordelling the boat upstream with supplies.⁶⁴

At the Powder River Redfield, who became ill, went back, and left the goods to be taken to Fort Sarpy by H. W. Beeson. This, then would indicate it was built sometime in 1857-58. It was on the south side of the Yellowstone, about twenty-five miles below the mouth of the Big Horn.

The fort was there in August of 1859, and was visited by Brig. Gen. W. F. Reynolds, but had been abandoned by July of 1860, when Lt. H. E. Maynadier went down the Yellowstone.⁶⁵ The abandonment of Fort Sarpy meant the last of the organized fur trading posts in that region.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 284.

⁶⁵The explorations of these two army officers will be discussed in the next chapter, for they were not associated with the fur trade.

One other famous and peritpatetic wanderer of the Northwest also made frequent use of the Yellowstone Valley as a route of travel. Father Pierre-Jean DeSmet made at least three separate journeys through the region--in 1840, 1842, and in 1851, but available material indicates he traveled only by land along the Yellowstone River.

CHAPTER III

EXPLORING EXPEDITIONS AND FLATBOATING ON THE YELLOWSTONE

The close of the fur trade era found the use of the flatboat, or mackinaw,¹ on the Yellowstone increasing rapidly as a means of downstream travel. From the Fort Sarpy diary excerpts a glimpse has been shown of the process of construction.

The mackinaw was usually built entirely of cottonwood plank about two inches thick. It was frequently fifty to sixty feet long, with a beam up to about twelve feet, with a flat bottom, and usually sharp at both ends. The gunwales arose about three feet above the water-line amidships, and increased in height toward the bow and stern.

In the bottom of the boat were stringers, fore and aft, and to these were spiked the bottom planks, in the first years with wooden pins, but later with iron nails. The sides were of plank, supported by knees. In the middle was usually a space partitioned off by bulkheads for cargo in bales.²

¹The mackinaw was a flatboat; and in general the two terms will be used interchangeably, although the true mackinaw was usually pointed at both ends, whereas the flatboat was a plain rectangular scow.

²Dhappell, op. cit., pp. 273-274.

The mackinaw, or flatboat, was for downstream use only, as it was too bulky and unwieldy to be dragged upstream. It was usually taken down on the June rise, floated with the current, and the only dangers were from snags (not numerous on the Yellowstone until its lower reaches), and Indians. The mackinaw was cheaply built, as it was to make only one voyage, and was usually sold at the downriver ports for the lumber.

Near every major post there was located a boatyard (called Chantier by the French), where the lumber was cut out by whipsaw, and the boats constructed.

For protection the boats frequently went down by fleets, but sometimes singly. For rate of travel note the following excerpt from a newspaper of June 30th, 1855:

The mackinaw boats which left Fort Sarpy on the Yellowstone river on the 19th of May also arrived at Council Bluffs on 23rd inst. The boats and cargo are property of the A. F. Company (American Fur Co. Company).³

This period was the beginning also of a series of expeditions, for pleasure, for exploration, and for gold, into the Yellowstone region. The Sir George Gore expedition of 1854-56 was such a pleasure and adventure trip.

Gore was an Irishman, from County Sligo, and left

³Montana Contributions, X, p. 288, citing a note from the Missouri Republican, June 30, 1855.

St. Louis in 1850 with forty men, one hundred and twelve horses, forty dogs, and twenty-one carts. He wintered in Fort Laramie, and proceeded the following year into the Powder River country, with Jim Bridger as guide, levying a fearful toll on the game of the region.

The winter of 1855-56 was spent in a winter camp he established on the Tongue River, fifteen miles above its mouth.

In the spring of 1856 Gore sent his wagons overland to Fort Union, and he and a portion of his command descended the Yellowstone in two flatboats.⁴ From Fort Union, after an altercation with the American Fur Company officials over the disposition of his goods, Gore and party left for St. Louis by steamboat.

Brevet Brigadier General William F. Reynolds, a Major of Engineers, and Lieutenant H. E. Maynadier explored the Yellowstone and Missouri Rivers in 1859-60 on orders from the War Department, Office of Explorations and Surveys.⁵ Their orders were to ascertain the numbers, habits, and disposition of Indians in the region, the agricultural and mineralogical

⁴F. George Heldt, "Sir George Gore's Expedition," from conversations with Henry Bostwick, a member, in Montana Contributions, I, pp. 128-131.

⁵Senate Exec. Document, #77, "Report of Brevet Brigadier General W. F. Reynolds on the Exploration of the Yellowstone and Country drained by that River", Annual Report of the Secretary of War, 40th Congress, 2nd Session, p. 4.

resources, climate, navigability of streams, topographical features, and the possibility of road or railroad building.

Lieutenant Maynadier was quite confident of the navigational possibilities of the Yellowstone, but Reynolds was doubtful, considering the rate of fall of the river so much greater than that of the Missouri as to render it unsuitable, and was, himself, more impressed by the possibilities of making use of the Big Horn, at least to the lower canyon, as a means of navigation.⁶ However, he was very favorably impressed with the Yellowstone Valley as a route for a railroad to the Three Forks region, with its agricultural and mineral wealth.

The Reynolds-Maynadier expedition was mainly overland, but was supplied in August of 1859 by boats upriver to Fort Sarpy. Because of the lateness of the season, they found it "almost impossible to navigate the Yellowstone, the water being too low, although the vessels, which are batteaux, draw only 18 inches."⁷ Their slow progress was speeded up the last few miles by the use of men and mules from Reynold's train to drag the boats upstream.

Fort Sarpy was described by Reynolds, in 1859, in this way:

⁶Ibid., p. 13.

⁷Ibid., p. 49.

We found the trading-house situated in the timber on what during high water would be an island. . . The "Fort" is an enclosure about 100 feet square, of upright cottonwood logs 15 feet high, the outer wall also forming the exterior of a row of log cabins.⁸

The roofs were flat, dirt-covered, and could serve for defensive purposes.

Leaving Fort Sarpy and traveling southward, the party wintered in Wyoming in the Deer Creek region, made a futile attempt to enter the Yellowstone Park region in June, and went down the Madison to the Three Forks. From this point General Reynolds proceeded on down the Missouri and Lt. Maynadier and part of the group followed Captain Clark's route to the Yellowstone, which he descended by land and by bull-boat.

Maynadier was much interested in the Yellowstone, and foresaw great possibilities for the region, with settlements on its banks, and steamboats plying the river, at least to the Big Horn, from May to August.

The main question in regard to this river is as to its navigability. In view of the fact that steamboats have been taken up the Missouri to Fort Benton, I have no hesitation in saying that the same thing can be done in the Yellowstone, as far as the mouth of the Big Horn river, without having as many or as great obstacles to overcome as in the Missouri. The only serious impediments below the mouth of the Big Horn are the rapids below Powder River and the Buffalo shoals, but I am of the opinion that these are

⁸Ibid., p. 50.

not worse than many in the upper Missouri. . . In the essentials of depth of water, abundance of fuel, and velocity of current, the Yellowstone presents greater advantages for navigation than the Upper Missouri.⁹

The Yellowstone Expedition of 1863 to the mouth of the Big Horn from the Deer Lodge and Beaverhead Valleys should be mentioned, even though the party traveled by land, because the trip was undertaken partly with the idea of selecting a point at the head of possible steamboat navigation for a town from which a wagon-road could be built to the mining regions. The group, under the leadership of James Stuart, found some traces of gold on the lower Big Horn, and plots for a townsite--Big Horn City--were laid out at the junction, but Indian trouble and disaster plagued the party until it finally left the region.¹⁰

By 1864 the possibility of making use of the Yellowstone as a means of getting out of Montana during the winter was appealing to more and more miners of the Virginia City and Helena regions. In spite of danger from Indians, and the distances involved, many would cross over to the present site of Livingston, frequently called Benson's Landing, go by mackinaw down the Yellowstone and Missouri to the nearest end of railroad transportation, and then to their homes.

⁹Ibid., p. 146.

¹⁰James Stuart, "The Yellowstone Expedition of 1863," Montana Contributions, I, pp. 132-205.

Frequently they were back in the Montana mining region in the spring, having gone around by Salt Lake City, and the Corinne to Dillon route, on their return.

Such a trip has been reported by Granville Stuart¹¹ to have taken place in 1864. He wrote:

On September 24, 1864, a party of twenty-five men furnished with the necessary implements, started for the Yellowstone to build boats for a journey east down the river.¹²

One hundred and twenty men had signed up. The boats were to have been completed by October 1st. Ninety-four men left Virginia City late in September, on foot, with their luggage in ox-drawn wagons, but on their arrival, instead of the boats being ready to start, "they found but two boats just begun."¹³

Some returned to Virginia City with the ox wagons, but seventy-five men pitched in to help finish the boats, "little better than rafts,"¹⁴ and on the seventh day started out.

The river was low and full of sand bars; in many places the current was swift and the boats unwieldy, they were no sooner off one bar than they were caught on another.¹⁵

¹¹Granville Stuart, Forty Years on the Frontier, edited by Paul C. Phillips, in two volumes, (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark Company, 1925).

¹²Ibid., p. 16.

¹³Ibid., p. 17.

¹⁴Loc. cit.

¹⁵Loc. cit.

Every misfortune plagued this trip. Provisions were low, game was scarce, they were caught in snowstorms, and much ice was forming in the river. About twenty miles above Fort Union the river froze the boats in, so they footed it to the fort. They had spent thirty days on the Yellowstone, and suffered everthing short of death itself. Some stayed at Union, others managed to get downstream before the Missouri froze. Mr. Stuart was back in Montana the next spring.

Beginning with the year 1865, and for several years thereafter, the Yellowstone river became a quite well known and popular highway for people going from Montana back to the states.¹⁶

Probably the most valuable account of such a trip is that of J. Allen Hosmer, who made the journey from Virginia City, Montana Territory, to Iowa, in 1865, when he was sixteen years old, and printed the account of the trip himself two years later--the second book to be published in Montana.¹⁷ J. Allen Hosmer was the son of Montana's first terri-

¹⁶An Illustrated History of the Yellowstone Valley, (Spokane, Washington: Western Historical Publishing Company), no date, no author, no editor, Material up to 1907.

¹⁷J. Allen Hosmer, A Trip to the States in 1865, written and printed by J. Allen Hosmer; at Virginia City, Montana, 1867, edited by Edith M. Duncan and reprinted in The Frontier, XII, Missoula, Montana, January, 1932, and again reprinted as Sources of Northwest History, No. 17, Missoula, 1932. Originals of this little book are very rare. Only two are known, one at the University of Montana, and one at the Montana Historical Library. They were crudely printed, one page at a time on a hand press, on $4\frac{1}{4}$ x $5\frac{1}{2}$ inch common newsprint, and bound in cardboard and brown cloth, hand-stitched.

orial chief justice, Hezekiah L. Hosmer, and returned to Virginia City after the trip which he recorded, and became clerk of the court and studied with his father.

The journey began September 21st, 1865, at Virginia City, and was by wagon to the head of navigation on the Yellowstone, near Emigrant Gulch, above the present city of Livingston. This part of the trip took five days.

On the morning of September 27th the boats that were to go down were finished, and were thirty-six in number. There were several different types, and all were divided into four fleets. One group of ten boats Hosmer described as being "sharp at the bow thirty two feet long, three feet high, eight feet wide in the centre, and four feet wide at the stern."¹⁸

The second fleet, of nine boats, was made up of common flatboats, with cabins on the stern. This group set off the day before Hosmer's party left.

The third group Hosmer described as "common Flats or mud scows,"¹⁹ a few with cabins for families.

The boats spoken of above were all built of pine lumber: Fleet no. 4 belonging to Van Cleave and Hanson, consisted of four boats, built of Cottonwood

¹⁸Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁹Loc. Cit.

lumber, and sharp at each end like the original Mackinaw boat.²⁰

The main part of the fleet set sail for "America" on the 27th of September, and reached the Missouri October 7th, having spent eleven days on the Yellowstone, with the chief danger having been from the numerous rapids. Several boats foundered, but Hosmer did not report any lives lost. The party was very wary of Indians, but none showed up during the course of the journey down the Yellowstone. Allen Hosmer had a copy of the Lewis and Clark journals,²¹ and avidly compared Clark's descriptions with the scenes as he found them. Forty-four days of boating from Emigrant Gulch finally got the party to the nearest of the states, Iowa.

According to Hosmer, the usual practice while flat-boating downstream was to tie up at some favorable spot at nightfall, and camp on solid ground rather than sleep on the boats, although they did on occasion, when especially fearful of Indians. Some of the boats had cabins and cooking and living facilities right on board.

²⁰Loc. cit.

²¹This could have been any one of several British editions published in 1807, 1809, 1814, 1815, 1817, or an American edition, History of the Expedition under the Command of Captains Lewis and Clark, Philadelphia: Bradford, 1814; but was quite likely the famous Nicholas Biddle edition, History of the Expedition under the Command of Captains Lewis and Clark, New York: Harper, 1842.

At times they were assisted on their downward journey by rowing, but the chief purpose of oars and sweeps seemed to be to help keep the boats in the channel, out of whirlpools, and to avoid snags or shallow water. Sixty to eighty miles a day was their average speed.

During this same period the possibility of establishing wagon roads through the Yellowstone region to the Virginia City and Helena areas was beginning to receive attention. It was on exploration for such a route that James A. Sawyer, the Superintendent of the Niobrara (Nebraska) to Virginia City Wagon Road reached the Yellowstone River with his party, on September 29th, 1865, and recorded having met what was apparently the Hosmer party:

We met, today, a fleet of Mackinaw boats, descending the Yellowstone, loaded with persons coming from the Territory to the States, to the number of four or five hundred.²²

Bancroft reported the date of opening of the route as 1866, but the Hosmer account shows it had been well-traveled the year before.

A new route was opened to the Missouri (from the mining region) in 1866, by mackinaws down the Yellowstone. A fleet of 16 boats, belonging to C. A. Head, carried 250 miners from Virginia City. It left the Yellowstone canon September 27th, and traveled to St. Joseph, 2,700 miles, in 28 days.

²²"Wagon Road from Niobrara to Virginia City," House Executive Documents #58, 39th Congress, 1st Session, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1866), p. 28.

St. Joseph Herald, Nov. 8, 1866. The pilot-boat of this fleet was sunk at Clarke fork of the Yellowstone with a loss of \$3,500. The expedition had in all \$500,000 in gold-dust.²³

The Montana Post, a newspaper being published at Virginia City, Montana, contained advertisements and news comment on the mackinaw fleet departure in the September 1, 1866, edition. The following is an excerpt from the news story:

Mackinaw Fleet--Ingersoll & Co. advertise to leave Virginia City and Helena on the 10th inst. for the states. Passengers will be taken from either of the above named places to any point above St. Louis, for twenty-five dollars. A fleet of Mackinaw boats are in waiting at the old starting point on the Yellowstone. The boats have capacity for carrying twenty-five men each, and are bullet-proof.²⁴

The following week another comment was made:

Mackinaws--The great mackinaw fleet commanded by Heerd & Co. will soon be off. The office is at the store of J. H. Ming, corner of Wallace and Jackson. This will be the largest fleet that ever left Montana, and will be able to whip all the Indians between the Rocky Mountains and Omaha. See their advertisement.²⁵

²³Bancroft, op. cit., p. 732.

²⁴The Montana Post, Virginia City, Montana, September 1, 1866, p. 5.

²⁵Ibid., September 8, 1866, p. 5. The advertisement referred to, on page 7 of the same issue, promised boats of good quality, experienced boatmen, and special accomodation for families. One hundred pounds of freight would be allowed, and teams were to leave Virginia City and Helena on September 10th to carry freight, baggage, and passengers to the Yellowstone.

The fleet the next year, 1867, met with considerable opposition from the Indians just below the Big Horn river, and one man was killed. The remainder of the party, sixty-seven men and two women, reached Omaha without further loss.²⁶ E. S. Topping, in reference to what must have been the same group, said that the boat with the ladies overturned and lost all contents near the mouth of the Powder River, but the passengers were picked up unharmed, though wet.²⁷

Another party of five men, starting later that season, was attacked at Clark's Fork. One was killed, the boat and provisions were lost, and the remainder of the party, having escaped, decided to walk back to Bozeman. They soon met another boat coming down, and talked its passengers into returning with them. In this group were two women and five children, and all were soon suffering extremely from hunger and exhaustion. One man finally went on ahead to Bozeman and returned with aid; all then safely were conveyed to that city.²⁸

Indications of continued flatboat travel on the

²⁶Bancroft, op. cit., p. 733, and Holtzheimer, "Down the Yellowstone Forty Years Ago," Pacific Quarterly, Jan., 1908, pp. 72-77.

²⁷E. S. Topping, The Chronicles of the Yellowstone, (St. Paul: Pioneer Press Company, 1883), p. 48.

²⁸Ibid., p. 49.

Yellowstone between 1867 and 1873 are scarce, and the traffic probably became almost non-existent because of fear of the Indians. The Sioux Indians were largely responsible for these attacks, for they were being pushed into the traditional land of the Crows, and were bitter over the white man's encroachments, the establishment of the Bozeman trail, and the army posts at the foot of the Big Horn mountains. Another factor contributing to the decline in traffic on the Yellowstone in the late sixties was the shift in mining interest from the Bannack and Virginia City areas to Helena, and the fact that Fort Benton and the Mullan Road furnished a satisfactory means of reaching that area and Idaho, and a route for leaving Montana.

Because settlements along the Yellowstone, with the exception of the Crow Agency and Fort Pease (1875), were practically nil, trade such as that mentioned in the following notice in a Helena newspaper could not have been very extensive. Mr. A. Jamison, who had the contract for building Story's Yellowstone fleet, reported that:

The fleet consists of ten boats, twelve feet wide and thirty feet long, and have a capacity of fifteen tons. They have been successfully launched, and are ready for navigation... It is the intention of Mr. Story to lead these boats with merchandise for the lower country, and ship it during the summer. It will undoubtedly be a paying investment.²⁹

²⁹Helena Daily Herald, May 17, 1873, quoting from The Bozeman Courier.

During the transfer of the Crow Agency from near the mouth of the Shields' River to the Stillwater, in 1875-1876, mackinaw fleets were used to run supplies down the Yellowstone to the new post.³⁰

It was also during 1875 that three men--Major Pease, Zed Daniels, and Paul McCormick--decided to establish a post near the mouth of the Big Horn to gather in the last remnants of the river trade. They departed, on June 17th, 1875, from Benson's Landing, in three flatboats, with twenty-two men and supplies. They lost some goods in the overturning of two of the boats, but built a post on the north side of the Yellowstone across from the mouth of the Big Horn.

This turned out to be an unfortunate venture, for the post was under constant harassment by the Indians, chiefly Sioux, now being pressed into the traditional home of the Crows, and bitterly hostile. The traders were scarcely able to show themselves outside of the rude fort.

Topping reported that late in the summer of 1875 a rescue mission to Fort Pease traveled down in four boats, one of which was name Rescue. They were swamped several times, but got through, and were warmly welcomed at the post.³¹

³⁰An Illustrated History, p. 27.

³¹Topping, op. cit., p. 140.

In the fall of 1875 another boat trip was made down to Fort Pease from Benson's Landing with goods. E. S. Topping, who had been exploring in the Yellowstone Park region, and had built himself a mackinaw to float some mineral and natural life specimens downriver, in November accompanied three other boats down as far as Fort Pease. There he decided to winter, and make some money as a wolf hunter, but the Indians were making things so hot that the Army, at Fort Ellis, near Bozeman, was finally appealed to for help.

General Terry's report for 1876 mentions that on February 19th, Fort Ellis had received an appeal "from a party who had established themselves for the purpose of trade, trapping, and mining at a point near the mouth of the Big Horn, known as Fort Pease."³²

A force was sent out to their relief, but of the original party at Fort Pease, six had been killed, and eight wounded. Most of the remainder gladly returned with the relief force, with the exception of some of the wolf-hunters, including Topping, who wanted to stay, but were finally forced by the Army to go.

During the next year, 1876, even though steamboats began to be seen regularly on the Yellowstone, the flat boat

³²General Alfred H. Terry, "Report of The Secretary of War," Executive Documents, 1st Session, 44th Congress, 1875, (Washington: U. S. Printing Office, 1876), p. 459.

or mackinaw was still much in use.

The Indian campaigns of the army were supplied from downriver by steamboat, but vegetables and flour, and other food supplies were being sent from the Gallatin valley downstream by flatboat, after being transported by wagon to Benson's Landing.

And other than military supplies were floated on the Yellowstone. Thomas H. Leforge, scout, soldier, and adopted member of the Crow Indian tribe for many years, noted in his memoirs that:

A "free trader," or "whiskey trader," as they some times were known, had come from Bozeman to Benson's Landing, where Livingston now is, and at this point he had loaded his goods into a flatboat and floated down the Yellowstone in search of soldier patronage. His main supply in the way of intoxicants was Jamaica ginger. He did not have to beat drums in order to attract customers.³³

Lieutenant James H. Bradley, in 1876 serving with General Gibbon's forces along the Yellowstone, recorded several similar instances in his journal. The Tuesday, May 23rd, entry:

Colonel Chestnut, a Bozeman gentleman, arrived today in a mackinaw boat, bringing a cargo of vegetables, butter, eggs, tobacco and other goods. He had a crew of four men, and had made the run from Benson's Landing without seeing any Sioux or meeting with any misadventure. The luxuries he brought

³³Thomas B. Marquis, Memoirs of a White Crow Indian, (Thomas H. Leforge) as told by Thomas B. Marquis, (New York: The Century Company, 1928), p. 263.

found ready sale and gave great satisfaction. Not the least acceptable article was a keg of beer, reserved for the officers and resulting in a convivial reunion in the evening at the tent of Lieutenants Hamilton and Schofield. It gave tongue to hitherto voiceless eloquence, inspired to polemical contests of racy sort, and put the voices of our singers once more in splendid tune. The time passed jolilly, Colonel Chestnut was voted the best fellowgoing, and the occasion will long be remembered as one of the greenest of the green spots in the campaign.³⁴

A few days later, on Sunday, May 28th, another vessel arrived.

Mr. McCormick, accompanied by two men, arrived today in a mackinaw, bringing a cargo of vegetables, butter, tobacco, cigars, canned goods, etc., and a large mail. . . . a limited quantity of whiskey and champagne cider, and convivial re-unions are a natural consequence.³⁵

Lieutenant William Phil Clark, stationed at Fort Ellis in 1876, made a mackinaw trip down the Yellowstone in August, accompanied by two officers and members of the 2nd Cavalry and 1st Infantry from Fort Ellis.³⁶ The party sailed from Benson's Landing about 4:30 P.M. on August 6th, and camped about fifteen miles below for the first night, two boats having grounded already, but catching up later.

³⁴Bradley, op. cit., p. 203.

³⁵Ibid., p. 206.

³⁶Lt. William P. Clark, "Memorandum of a Voyage from Benson's Landing on the Yellowstone to the Mouth of the Powder River, 1876", typewritten manuscript in Montana Historical Library, Helena, Montana, no page numbers.

On Monday, August 7th, running from 5:00 A.M. till 6:30 P.M., the group made sixty-five miles and landed near Countryman's place at the mouth of the Stillwater.

Without further difficulties, but maintaining a careful watch for Indians, the mouth of the Rosebud was reached at 11:15 A.M. on Friday, August 11th, and there Clark met General Miles, aboard the steamer Far West. "By him I was directed to load boats with forage & proceed to the mouth of the Powder river--30 miles.³⁷ This was successfully accomplished, and there the mackinaw trip ended.

An item of June 16, 1876, indicates that the carrying of mail was another service of the useful mackinaw boat:

A mackinaw has been built at Ft. Ellis for carrying the mail to Gen. Gibbon's command. P. W. McCormick will take command of it leaving Benson's Landing Tuesday next.³⁸

During 1877 and the famous retreat of Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce Indians, mackinaws were used more than once to transport wounded and prisoners down the Yellowstone.

A daily log kept at the newly established Tongue River Cantonment (Miles City) by the commander, George Gibbon, states that on September 22, 1877, "A mackinaw boat arrived from the Upper Yellowstone with 7 wounded men from

³⁷Loc. Cit.

³⁸Bozeman, Montana, Avant Courier, June 16, 1876.

Sturgis' fight with the Nez Perces on 13th instant."³⁹

In the spring of 1877 the young scout and adventurer, Luther S. Kelly, who became widely known as "Yellowstone Kelly," with a party of soldiers journeyed down the Yellowstone from the Tongue River Cantonment in a mackinaw, but did not think too highly of that method of travel. "I make no doubt but I paid my way in steering that old tub through perilous rapids and around the rocks and snags."⁴⁰

A much more complete and descriptive account of a trip down the Yellowstone this same year is contained in Fred G. Bond's Flatboating on the Yellowstone, 1877.⁴¹ Bond had been born in Brooklyn in 1852, but the West had pulled him to Mexico and Arizona by the time he was twelve years old. He drifted to the Northwest and to Montana after the army had quieted the Indians, and spent some time as a hunter and prospector.

During the months of September and October of 1877, Bond found himself engaged shooting buffalo on the Yellowstone, and floating the hides down to Fort Keogh and Miles

³⁹Aldred H. Terry, "Report of," Report of the Secretary of War, Vol. I, Executive Document #1, Part 2, 45th Congress, 2nd Session, (Washington: U.S. Printing Office, 1877), p. 547.

⁴⁰Luther S. Kelly, Yellowstone Kelly, edited by M.M. Quaife, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1926), p. 176.

⁴¹Fred G. Bond, Flatboating on the Yellowstone, 1877, reprinted from a manuscript in the New York Public Library, (New York: New York Public Library, 1925).

City.

At Fort Keogh, on one such trip, Bond found General Miles with Chief Joseph and his band of Nez Perces as prisoners, fresh from the defeat at the Bear Paw Mountains.

There was also a fleet of flat boats tied up at Miles City. These boats had been run down the river from the upper country, loaded with garden truck, eggs and butter from the Gallatin Valley and the boats sold to the government.⁴²

Bond evidently had a reputation as a river-man, for he was asked to run a boatload of the prisoners down to Fort Buford by the Quartermaster. Having consented, he looked the boats over, and picked out what appeared to be the swiftest runner, thirty-two feet long, eight feet wide, "tapering slightly at each end. . . and made double of inch whipsawed lumber, calk with pitch and tar and having four long sweeps-oars."⁴³

It was to be a 400 mile trip, and his passengers were twenty-two Nez Perce prisoners, made up of the women, the sick, wounded, and children, as the able-bodied were to go by land to Bismark, the end of the railway.

General Miles and Doctor Reed rode part way with Bond, planning to catch up with the wagon train.

The trip started well, until they reached the Buffalo

⁴²Ibid., p. 4.

⁴³Loc. cit.

Rapids, a few miles below Miles City.

The fall season had been a dry one and the water in the river very low making it appear very dangerous to shoot the rapids but I had been over them before and I knew where the deep water channel was.⁴⁴

General Miles was very nervous through the rapids. One of the other flatboats behind got turned sideways, and was crushed on some rocks, with the loss of nearly all on board. All the others made it through, and soon overtook the wagon train, where good-byes were said to General Miles. His orders to the boat captains were to stay together, but a competition soon developed to see which could reach Fort Buford first, with a watch the prize.

With many a sunken snag or rock to doge on the downward voyage I must run from sun to sun and not get tied up in some false channel perhaps losing a days travel.⁴⁵

Bond organized his charges efficiently, assigned each one duties, and found them very tractable and co-operative. In fact, one may, from reading his notes, be almost safe in saying he developed a romantic attachment for one of the young Indian maidens on board.

The party camped at night, and one hour at noon. Everything on the boat and in encamping and breaking camp

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 5.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 6.

was arranged for speed, yet all the while being watchful for ambush.

At Wolf Rapids, below the Powder River, Bond noted:

These rapids are longer than the Buffalo Rapids and are wild and dangerous but they contain more water. . . . The early day steamboats came up the rapids by tow-line fastened to the shore and a windlass on the steamboat.⁴⁶

To bring the story to a happy conclusion, Bond won the watch by being first to report to Fort Buford, and was then ordered to continue on down to Bismark, the rail-head, with his passengers. This he did, and there sadly bid them farewell.

Even during the years 1877-1881, when steamboats were a common sight on the Yellowstone, flatboats and mackinaws were in frequent use for downstream travel and freight. One other interesting voyage on the Yellowstone was made by a sailing yacht, the Speckled Trout, owned, built, and captained by P. C. Sovereign. This craft had a main sail twenty feet high, and twenty-eight foot boom, and had cost around \$1,000.00 to build. With six passengers and a cargo of furs, hides, and speckled trout, she sailed from Benson's Landing in May of 1878 for Sioux City and Omaha.⁴⁷ The

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 9.

⁴⁷Bozeman Avant Courier, June 13, 1878, citing from the Sioux City, Iowa, Journal of May 30, 1878.

boat was tied up every night, but one day, with a good wind, she made 400 miles.

After the coming of the railroad mackinaw and flat-boat travel dwindled away to insignificance, though not before it had made a noteworthy contribution to travel in Montana, to the support of troops engaged in opening up a large new area, and to the settlement of that area.

CHAPTER IV

STEAMBOATING ON THE YELLOWSTONE

Even while the mackinaw was still in common use for downstream travel on the Yellowstone, the steamboat was introduced onto the river by the United States Army. It was necessary to find a sure, dependable means of supplying military expeditions while they were carrying on extended campaigns, far from their bases of supply, against the Sioux Indians. The steamboat offered a possible solution to that problem.

Such service, however, had long been hoped for by civilian groups. During the 1860's when gold in Montana and Idaho was attracting streams of fortune-seekers to the region, up the long, tortuous course of the Missouri River to Fort Benton and then overland to the mining camps, several interested groups attempted to promote a town at the head of steamboat navigation on the Yellowstone, which point they thought should be around the mouth of the Big Horn River.¹ This attempt was without success.

A man named Nick Wall spent the winter 1862-63 in Montana, and upon his return to St. Louis that spring entered into a partnership with John J. Roe to do

¹Supra, p. 56.

steamboating in the new country. This firm was in opposition to that of LaBarge, Harkness and Company,² and the poster reproduced on the next page was undoubtedly part of the attempt to catch the trade, but it never materialized. None of the plans of Montanans for a road from Virginia City to the head of navigation, or a townsite on the Yellowstone, materialized either, until the valley had been cleared of hostile Indians by the military forces.

Most of the steamboats that subsequently appeared on the Yellowstone were designed and built for Missouri River duty, and the trade on the Yellowstone is closely tied in with that on the Upper Missouri.

The early Missouri River boats were crude affairs, usually with only one engine, and one boiler, and constantly in difficulty. The first on the Missouri was the Independence, in 1819, which ascended only a few miles and returned to St. Louis.³

By 1840 a few improvements had been made--better cabins, lighter draft, two boilers, and two engines. In 1842 there were twenty-six steamboats in the lower Missouri.⁴

²H. M. Cittenden, History of Early Steamboat Navigation on the Missouri River, (New York: Francis P. Harper, 1903), Vol. 2. p. 324.

³Chappell, op. cit. p. 279.

⁴Ibid., p. 280.

FIGURE III

POSTER: HO FOR THE YELLOWSTONE

(Reproduced from a poster in the Montana Historical Library collection). See appendix.

The years 1850-60 were the golden years for steam-boats on the Missouri. The boats were by then much improved, and the fully-equipped passenger steamer during this period was a magnificent specimen. It was generally about 250 feet long, with a forty foot beam, and full-length cabins that could carry from 300 to 400 people. The lower deck was usually for cargo, fuel, deck passengers, and machinery. The cabins were next above, and then the "texas" for officers. Atop the "texas" was seated the pilot-house, highly ornamented with glass and scroll-work. The whole was painted a dazzling white, except for the stacks.⁵ Freight capacity was often from 500 to 700 tons.

The cabins and salons were splendidly furnished, and dinner menus were extravagant. The crew of a first-class passenger steamer consisted of the captain, two clerks, two pilots, four engineers, two mates, with frequently a total crew of seventy-five to ninety people.

The captains were generally paid about \$200 a month, but the pilots were the real autocrats of boat and river, sometimes commanding as much as \$1,200 a month.

The boom afforded the Missouri River trade by the discovery of gold in Montana was of short duration, but very profitable. A boat could and often did make \$15,000 to

⁵Ibid., p. 284.

\$17,000 profit a voyage, with one recorded trip netting \$40,000.⁶

Of course, the luxury vessels above-mentioned rarely made the trip to the upper river, being too heavy and unwieldy. Practically all personal memoir accounts of voyages to the upper Missouri are unanimous in their description of monotony and unpleasantness of food and quarters.

The risks taken by a river boat were as great as the possible profits. Probably the greatest was the danger of striking a submerged snag (uprooted tree that had been brought down by the current and lodged on a bar or in a channel). These caused the greatest percentage of sinkings on the Missouri, although a lesser evil on the Yellowstone. Fire and explosion of over-taxed boilers were frequent. To be left stranded in the upper river by a rapid fall of water level was an ever-present worry. Indians frequently ambushed the boats where bluffs lined the river, and illness or gold fever would often decimate a crew and leave the boat helpless.

One of the chief difficulties was the scarcity of fuel. The average boat burned about twenty-five cords of hardwood, or thirty cords of cottonwood in twenty-four hours steaming, with \$8 per cord the minimum cost.⁷ On the upper

⁶Ibid., p. 294.

⁷Hanson, The Conquest of the Missouri, (Chicago: A. G. McClurg & Company, 1910), p. 115.

river the captains relied on chance accumulations of drift-wood or dead standing timber, as green cottonwood was very unsatisfactory. Although there were vast deposits of lignite fuel right along the banks of the upper Missouri and Yellowstone, repeated attempts to make it burn in the steamboat boilers all failed.

Lonely wood-choppers who braved the danger of Indians, the crude huts, and hard toil of supplying fuel at intervals along the rivers, were called "wood-hawks."⁸ But most frequently, and especially on the Yellowstone, boats had to depend on their own crews to "wood boat" every time they touched shore.

There were three different steamboats named Yellowstone, only one of which ever navigated the river of that name. The first, built in 1831 by Pierre Chouteau of the American Fur Company for the mountain trade, was 130 feet long, had a beam of nineteen feet, a six foot hold, side-wheels, one engine, and two chimneys. In 1832 it ascended the Missouri to Fort Union, at the mouth of the Yellowstone, the first to reach that point.

Another boat of the same name, a small stern-wheeler, was reported built in Cincinnati in 1864, and Yellowstone #3

⁸Ibid., p. 116.

was built for Dr. Lamme and Nelson Story of Bozeman in Crawfordsville, Indiana, in 1875-76, making its first trip in 1876, and sinking in the Buffalo Rapids in the Yellowstone River, in 1879.

When the United States Army, in 1864-64, began to formulate plans for eventual final control of the Sioux nation following the Minnesota massacres, a series of four posts across the Northern plains was envisaged.

General Pope, Commander of the new department of the Northwest, with headquarters at Milwaukee, Wisconsin, outlined a plan to build one post at Devils' Lake, one at the James River, another on the Missouri River at Long Lake, and the fourth on the Yellowstone near old Fort Alexander.⁹

In such plans, with such an extended supply problem, the possibility of steamer supply was an important factor, and General Sully, during his summer campaign of 1864, was to judge the feasibility of supplying a post on the Yellowstone, possibly by water, and was given wide latitude in deciding whether or not such a post was practical and necessary.

General Halleck, from the Headquarters of the Army, March 14, 1864, wrote to Major General Pope recommending not

⁹John Pope, "Report of", War of the Rebellion, Vol. XXXIV, Series I, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1893), p. 622.

one, but two posts--one on the Powder River and the other on the Yellowstone at the mouth of the Big Horn," . . . the latter being supplied by steamers, which it is said can navigate the Yellowstone to that point, and perhaps above."¹⁰

To supply General Sully's campaign, in the spring of 1864, eight steamers in all gathered in St. Louis. On one, the Marcella, Grant Marsh, later to become the greatest river pilot and master on the Yellowstone, made his first trip to the upper river as mate.¹¹ The supply steamers reached Fort Rice, Dakotah, in July, finding very low water for that time of year.

Sully's plan was to march overland with his troops from Fort Rice to the Yellowstone, but he instructed three of the steamers, the Chippewa Falls, the Alone, and the Island City, chosen for their light draft, to meet him at "Braseau's Houses," a trading establishment on the Yellowstone's left bank, about fifty miles above its mouth.

The part played in the expedition by the Chippewa Falls is recounted by Granville Stuart.¹² She had been purchased in the winter of 1863-64 by a group of St. Paul men

¹⁰Ibid., p. 608

¹¹Hanson, op. cit., p. 53.

¹²Stuart, op. cit., pp. 25-26. A full report on the steamboat expedition is also contained in the St. Paul, Minnesota, Pioneer, November 15, 1864.

who organized the Idaho Steam Packet Company. Their object was to establish a route from Minnesota to the gold mines. On her first trip, however, the Chippewa Falls was impressed into General Sully's supply service, May 19, 1864. She helped ferry troops across the Missouri near Fort Rice at about the Cannonball River, and then started for the Yellowstone on General Sully's orders, accompanied by the Alone and the Island City. The latter struck a snag and sank near Fort Union.

Stuart reported that the Chippewa Falls left the Alone and her cargo at Fort Union, and started up the Yellowstone on an exploring expedition.

So it was that the 'Chippeway Falls,' which drew about thirteen inches of water when light, commanded by Captain Abraham Hutchinson, was the first steamer whose paddles ever stirred the waters of the Yellowstone.¹³ (Around August 1, 1864).

Finding about four feet of water, and pronouncing navigation of the Yellowstone practicable, Captain Hutchinson returned for his consort, the Alone, and freight, and then, leading the way proceeded upstream to the Braseau Houses. From there they moved up and down stream for six days looking for the overland expedition.¹⁴

¹³Ibid., p. 27.

¹⁴Judge Nicholas Hilger, "General Alfred Sully's Expedition of 1864," Montana Contributions, Vol. II, p. 320.

But the overland expedition, under General Sully, was having more than its share of difficulties. He had struck, with a wagon train, right into the worst of the bad lands between the Missouri and the Yellowstone. His guide failed him. Indians harassed the train, and engaged in one pitched battle. The water supply ran out, and it was with genuine relief that the expedition finally made its way down to the Yellowstone near present Glendive, "over a section of country I never wish to travel again."¹⁵

Fortunately, we here met the two boats I ordered to get up the Yellowstone if possible, and the first steamer that ever attempted to ascend this river. These boats were the Chippewa Falls and Alone, small stern wheel steamers, the former drawing only twelve inches light; they each had about fifty tons of freight. Very little of it corn. The steamer Island City, having nearly all my corn, struck a snag near Fort Union and sunk. The steamers attempted to go above this point, but a rapid shoal rendered it impossible. It was also fortunate for the boats that we arrived when we did, for the water is falling fast.¹⁶

It appeared that the boats might have to be abandoned, but cargoes were put in wagons, the horses helped the two steamers over shallow places, and they successfully reached the mouth.

General Sully's expedition of 1864 accomplished very

¹⁵Sully; "Report of," The War of the Rebellion, Series I, Vol. XLI; Part I; (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1893), p. 148.

¹⁶Loc. cit.

little as far as the Indians were concerned, and he advised against the building of a post on the Yellowstone.

Consequently, in spite of this successful navigation of a portion of the Yellowstone, and in a season of the year when very low water could be expected, steamboats did not again appear on the river until nine years later. The same factors that put a virtual end to mackinaw traffic--fear of Indians, the shift in mining activity to the Helena region, and the established route to Fort Benton--contributed to the lack of development of steamboating on the Yellowstone from 1864- to 1873.

The reappearance of the steamboat in 1873 was in support of surveying expeditions--the forerunner of the railroad that was to mean the end of all large-scale steamboat freighting on the upper Missouri. By 1870 the arrival of the railroad at Sioux City had already cut the trade from St. Louis to the Northwest.

Captain Grant Marsh had been engaged in trade from Sioux City to Fort Buford, and in 1871 he helped form the Coulson Packet Company that was to play a large part in the navigation of the Yellowstone. Members were Commodore Sanford B. Coulson, brothers Captain Martin and Captain John Coulson, Captains James McVay, John Todd, Grant F. Marsh, and Messrs. Durfee and Peck. Of their original seven boats five--the Nellie Peck, Far West, Western, Key West, and

E. H. Durfee—were later in service on the Yellowstone.¹⁷

The most famous of these, the Far West, was typical of the boats built expressly for the upper river. She was a stern-wheeler of 397 tons, 190 feet by 33 feet. She cost \$24,000 when built in Pittsburgh in 1870. In addition to her light draft, the Far West had no "texas" and a very small cabin, accommodating only about thirty-three persons. The smallness of her superstructure gave little area for the strong winds peculiar to the upper river region to catch and capsize her, or drive her against the bank. After her Indian war career, the Far West was sold by the Coulson Company and served in the lower river until she hit a snag and sank, a total loss, near the mouth of the Missouri, October 20, 1883.¹⁸

Early in 1873 Captain Grant Marsh, on board the Key West, sister ship of the Far West, arrived at Fort Lincoln, Dakotah. Here he met General George A. Forsyth, who was to take military command of the steamer, and explore the Yellowstone River to the mouth of the Powder, with the object of determining the river's navigability. If it proved to be feasible, steamers were to be used in support of the troops accompanying the railroad survey.

¹⁷Hanson, op. cit., p. 136.

¹⁸Chapell, op. cit., p. 160.

Forsyth needed reliable guides and hunters who knew the Yellowstone region, so, on the way up the Missouri on board the Key West after leaving Fort Lincoln, Captain Marsh recommended his old acquaintance, "Yellowstone" Kelly. He was sure Kelly would be somewhere on the upper river. Marsh was right, for they met him at a lonely trapper and wood-chopper's point, and persuaded him to join the expedition, where his services proved invaluable.

At Fort Buford two companies of infantry were taken on board, and the Key West entered the Yellowstone on May 6th, finding the water still low that early in the season, and having to use spars at places.¹⁹ This sparring operation, or "grasshoppering," as it was called, was a commonly used device for working the boat over a bar or through shallow water. Two long spars were suspended from booms, one on each side, near the bow of the boat. When aground, one end of these would be placed on the bottom, winches would raise the front of the boat slightly, and then, with a mighty effort from the paddles, the vessel might lurch forward a few feet, when the laborious process was gone through again. Strangely enough, the paddles were sometimes reversed, with the idea of forcing an inch or two more of water forward

¹⁹Hanson, op. cit. p. 160.

under the boat, and enabling the winches to pull it forward more easily. It is easy to see where the operation got its picturesque name, for the booms and spars, when in place, were not unlike a grasshopper's legs.

On this trip, despite the labor involved in working the Key West through some shallow places, a point within two miles of the Powder River was reached, and there a reef, that later on in the season would be no obstacle, barred their further progress.²⁰ It was a pleasant trip for the soldiers. Kelly was hunter, scout, and gatherer of information, and no Indians were encountered. General Forsyth established a depot at Glendive Creek for the succeeding military expedition that was to come up in June to support the railroad surveyors.

Nine days after having entered the Yellowstone, the Key West was back at Fort Buford. Much of the credit for the success of the trip was due to Marsh's skill, and this the army officers and men freely acknowledged on their return.

In our trip up the Yellowstone, which we ascended at a very low stage of water, he was constantly on deck, and always alert, whether his boat was in the

²⁰ See map on p. 130.

²¹ Captain Marsh named many of the natural features of the region on this trip, many of which names have stuck to this day.

stream during the day or tied up against the river bank at night. His judgment as to what he could do with the Key West in threading the unknown shoals and working through the rapids among dangerous and partially submerged rocks, was good to see, and his skill in handling his boat and in using his spars and hawsers to force her over and through sandy shallows and gravelly riffles showed a most capable knowledge of his vocation.²²

General Stanley was in command of the military expedition assigned to cover the group of Northern Pacific Railroad surveyors and engineers, working westward from Bismarck. General Sheridan, commanding the military division, after receiving General Forsyth's favorable report, arranged with Captain Coulson of the Coulson Packet Company to furnish boats to ascend the Yellowstone. Thus, in June of 1873, the steamers Peninah, Key West, and Far West loaded at Bismarck with supplies for the Yellowstone.²³ The surveyors and troops were to march overland.

All three vessels easily made it to the depot that General Forsyth had laid out in May at the mouth of the Glendive Creek. Two of them unloaded their goods and were released, but the Key West, Grant Marsh, Captain, was retained, and waited twelve days for the overland party. General Custer, with part of his 7th Cavalry, was first to arrive. The main

²²Hanson, op. cit., p. 168, citing a letter to the author from General Forsyth.

²³Eugene V. Smalley, History of the Northern Pacific Railroad, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1883), p. 436.

party was about twenty miles above at a point called Stanley's Stockade, so the Key West transferred supplies to that point. She ferried the surveying party about fifty miles further upriver, then returned to the Stockade to take the army across the river. Again the steamboat returned upstream to the mouth of the Powder River with mail for the troops. On its way downstream, after completing that mission, the Key West met the Josephine, coming up with supplies, at about Glendive Creek. Because the Josephine was of lighter draft, and because of the lateness of the season and the low water, Captain Marsh transferred to her, and sent the Key West out of the river.

The Josephine had been built in Freedom, Pennsylvania, for the Coulson line, under careful instructions from Captain Grant Marsh. She was a stern-wheeler of 300 tons, 178 feet by 31 feet, with two engines and two boilers. She was named for the small daughter of General Stanley. This year of 1873 was her first in service, but she was to become one of the best known and longest-lived of the old fleet that plied the Yellowstone. In 1906 she was still being used on the lower Missouri River by the government as a snag boat, until ice cut her down at Running Water, South Dakota, on March 8, 1907.²⁴ She sank, but her boilers and machinery were later

²⁴Chappell, op. cit., p. 314.

FIGURE IV

THE STEAMER JOSEPHINE

This photo was taken later in her career when she was serving the U.S. Army Engineers as a snag-boat. Print secured from Steamboat Photo Company, 121 River Avenue, Sweickley, Pennsylvania. See appendix.

raised and shipped to the Yukon.=

The railroad survey and troops had continued up the Yellowstone Valley to Pompey's Pillar, and there left the valley and crossed over to the Musselshell. On its return, the party struck the Yellowstone about eight miles above the Powder River on the 31st of August, and there found the Josephine waiting. Captain William Ludlow, of the engineers, had ordered her up with a supply of forage and some necessary clothing.²⁵

Continuing downstream, the overland group reached a point opposite the supply depot on September 9th. "The steamer Josephine arrived the same day, and the four succeeding days were employed in ferrying over the command, and preparing for the homeward march."²⁶

Surplus stores were loaded on board, and some troops, and she was sent downriver. Captain Marsh assured General Stanley he had water enough, despite lateness of the season, but when writing his report at Fort Abraham Lincoln, on September 25th, Stanley was much concerned because the

²⁵Major-General D. S. Stanley, Personal Memoirs of Major-General D. S. Stanley, U.S.A., (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1917), p. 241.

²⁶Elizabeth J. R. Atwater, "Letters of Montgomery Meigs Written While Engaged in the Survey of the Northern Pacific Railroad, 1872-73," unpublished Master's Thesis, Montana State University, 1937, p. iv.

Josephine had not been heard from, although she finally made it through. Leeson reported she reached Fort Buford on the 17th of September.²⁷

General Stanley, in his report written October 12th, 1873, from Fort Sully, Dakota, on the Expedition of 1873, said that "Last Summer's experience very fairly proved that the Yellowstone is equally as well fitted for navigation as the Missouri above Fort Buford."²⁸ He reported that Captain Marsh and the Josephine ascended Wolf Rapids, which he considered the worst on the river, without taking out a line. Stanley foresaw a grand future for the valley, if the Indians could be quelled. Coal, irrigation of farm lands, and steamboat or railroad supply would all contribute to a prosperous valley, he thought.

This government use of steamboat navigation of the Yellowstone was exciting extreme interest in such Montana communities as Bozeman, which was anxious to secure a freight route to and from the growing Gallatin Valley. A movement was again made in that city to open a road from Bozeman to the Head of navigation on the Yellowstone, and to build a steamer to run from there to the Missouri. Government aid was also sought in improving the channel.

²⁷Leeson, op. cit., p. 398.

²⁸Stanley, op. cit., p. 264.

especially at the Wolf Rapids.²⁹ A point on the Yellowstone, similar to Fort Benton on the Missouri, where freight could be transferred from steamboat to wagons, would make rates considerably cheaper for Gallatin Valley residents.

This thought was undoubtedly one of the motives for the "Yellowstone Wagon-Road and Prospecting Expedition," formed by prominent Bozeman citizens early in 1874, which left Bozeman on February 13, 1874, and was gone four months. It had several encounters with Indians, and had one man killed and two wounded. Nothing of real value was accomplished, for no road was established, no city was laid out, and no gold was found (which many citizens, and especially the military, thought was the real reason for the expedition.)³⁰

No steamboat was reported on the Yellowstone in 1874, but the following year army interest was revived because of the growing Indian unrest. Therefore, to make a complete survey of the Yellowstone River navigational possibilities, in order to supply possible future posts in the valley, Lt. General P. H. Sheridan had the steamer Josephine placed at the disposal of Lt. General James W. Forsyth and Lt. Col-

²⁹An Illustrated History, p. 261, and Bancroft, op. cit. p. 733.

³⁰Burlingame, op. cit., pp. 208-209.

onel F. D. Grant at Bismarck. They were to note carefully timber resources, soil, geological formations, depth of water, rapids, and value of agricultural lands.³¹

The group picked up a detachment of two companies of troops from Fort Buford, in addition to the one company from Fort Stevenson already on board, to serve as escort, and left Fort Buford on the 26th of May for the headwaters of the Yellowstone.³² On board the Josephine, again being commanded and piloted by Grant Marsh, were one month's subsistence, seven officers, and one hundred enlisted men, for a strong guard was maintained at all night camps.

The mouth of the Big Horn was reached by Monday, May 31st, and spars and lines were used for the first time about twenty-seven miles above, where the current in rapids reached eight or nine miles per hour.

Troubles soon increased, and on June 7th the decision to turn back downstream was made, at a point estimated to be 250 miles above the Powder River. This point is now reckoned to be somewhere near the southwest end of the present city of Billings, Montana. Captain Marsh is supposed to have

³¹James W. Forsyth, and F. D. Grant, Report of an Expedition Up the Yellowstone River Made in 1875, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1875.

³²Bozeman Avant Courier, June 18, 1875, p. 22, citing from the Bismarck Tribune, June 2, 1875.

tied up to a giant cottonwood tree and inscribed the date on its trunk, but the tree was later destroyed and swept away by high water.

J. M. V. Cockran, a Billings old-timer, is reported by I. D. O'Donnell to have selected the spot as a homesite in 1877.

The place he selected as a home. . . was two miles up the river from Billings. It is in many ways a historical place, among them being the fact that it was the site of the famous "Josephine tree," the giant trunk to which the steamer Josephine anchored at the terminus of her voyage up the Yellowstone.³³

Mr. Cockran was not there at the time of the voyage, but he remembered the tree and wanted it kept as a relic instead of being permitted to be swept away.

The Indian scout and "squaw-man," LeForge, mentions a visit to the steamer Josephine. "The most noteworthy incident of our trip (to notify Crows of the change of Agency to the Stillwater) was our discovery of the steamboat 'Josephine' coming up the Yellowstone."³⁴ He went on board, and as this was his first visit on a steamer, he gazed long and wonderingly at the gleaming machinery.

³³Memories of Joseph M. V. Cockran, "Montana Monographs," EDITED BY I. D. O'Donnell, 1928-29. A typewritten loose-leaf notebook collection in Parmlly Billings Memorial Library, Billings, Montana, no page numbers.

³⁴Thomas Marquis, op. cit., p. 107.

On its return, the Josephine steamed up the Big Horn about twelve miles,³⁵ and then safely made the return to Fort Buford, where she arrived June 10th, 1875.

The mouth of the Big Horn may be regarded as the head of navigation on the Yellowstone River, and for three months of the year this river presents less obstacles to its navigation than the Upper Missouri. . . The channel is unchanging, for it passes over a gravel bed from its head to its mouth, and there are no snags.³⁶

This trip of 1875, though not the first instance of steamboat travel on the Yellowstone, may safely be said to be the most important, for it showed that troops could be supplied by water, at least for a limited season of the year, and can be credited with the sending of the army against the Sioux, and making it safe for the Northern Pacific Railroad to continue, with such far-reaching results for the valley and Montana. Residents of the Gallatin Valley, particularly, followed the news of the Josephine with great interest, for they foresaw the possibility of a wagon road to connect with the head of navigation on the Yellowstone as a means of shorter, faster freight and passenger service to and from that fertile valley, with its increasing agricultural

³⁵Grant Marsh reported this side excursion to have been made on the upward trip, Forsyth indicated that it was on the downstream journey. The latter, making a military report immediately after the trip, may be judged the more accurate.

³⁶Forsyth and Grant, Report, p. 10.

products.

Yellowstone Transportation Company was organized at Bozeman in 1875 to secure boats and navigate the Yellowstone River. The success of this company seemed very slow, until taken hold of by Messrs. Lamme and Nelson Story, two of Bozeman's wealthy men. . . they had a boat built at Evansville, Indiana, for the Yellowstone. (The Yellowstone #3)³⁷

Interest was keen in Bozeman and vicinity all during 1876 in the progress of this vessel on its first voyage to the Yellowstone, as evidenced by the following comments from the Avant-Courier:

The steamer Yellowstone has received her loading at St. Louis and was billed to leave for head of navigation on the Yellowstone river to-day. Over-land trains are in readiness to meet her at the head of navigation and transport her cargo to its destination.³⁸

.....

It is claimed that freight and passengers can save 400 miles of river transportation and 100 miles by land, by taking the Yellowstone in preference to the Missouri, a matter that must command attention and very soon direct the increasing Montana traffic to some point on the upper Yellowstone. . . The Yellowstone steamer is one of the finest boats that ever reached this point.³⁹

And another optimistic prediction:

Business will be lively on the Yellowstone this season. The government will have boats chartered to take up what will be needed to build the two forts. . . The military operations will require the

³⁷Leeson, op. cit., p. 406.

³⁸Bozeman, Montana, Avant-Courier, April 14, 1876, p. 1.

³⁹Avant Courier, June 16, 1876, p. 3. citing from the Yankton Press and Dakotaian of May 26.

shipment of large supplies up and down the Yellowstone.⁴⁰

Steamboats were playing a large part in the plans that were going forward, early in 1876, among the army commands, for extensive campaigns against the Sioux. The General of the Army, W. T. Sherman, at Lt. General Sheridan, head of the Missouri division, had ordered a huge three-pronged movement of troops aimed at the vast territory south of the Yellowstone and east of the Big Horn River. Brig. General Terry was to move westward from Fort Lincoln, Dakota. General Crook and forces were to come from the area of the Platte River, and Colonel Gibbon was to proceed eastward down the Yellowstone Valley from Fort Ellis.

To supply this campaign steamboats were to be relied upon, and a very considerable fleet of eight boats was sent up the river from Fort A. Lincoln. They were the Far West, Tiger, Benton #2, Silver Lake, Carroll, Yellowstone, E. H. Durfee, and the Josephine.⁴¹

General Terry marched overland from Fort Lincoln with 600 cavalry and 400 infantry troops, and on the 7th of June he met one of his supply steamers, the Far West, under Grant Marsh, at the mouth of the Powder River, the others having

⁴⁰ Avant Courier, March 10, 1876, p. 3.

⁴¹ Leeson, op. cit., p. 398.

come up only to Stanley's Stockade.

Captain Marsh had taken command of the Far West this summer because he had a fair idea of what kind of work was going to be required of the steamers in the campaign, and because the Far West was best fitted for that work. As events were to prove, it was a wise and fortunate choice.

Colonel Gibbon had already been ordered to suspend his movements and await junction with Terry, so on June 9th, General Terry went on the steamer up the Yellowstone till he met Gibbon, at a point ten or fifteen miles below the mouth of the Tongue River. As a result of conferences held aboard the boat, Colonel Gibbon's forces were stationed at the mouth of the Rosebud, and General Terry established a depot at the mouth of the Powder.

The Far West served as a frequent meeting place for the officers, and repeatedly was used as a ferry to carry men and horses from one side of the river to another. In addition, it carried on exceedingly valuable patrol duty up and down the Yellowstone, insuring that the Indians did not cross the river and escape northward. Exact numbers and location of the hostiles were not known, nor did General Terry know anything of General Crook's encounter on the upper Rosebud on the 17th of June, until after the disaster at the Little Big Horn.

Lack of exact knowledge concerning the numbers of

FIGURE V

THE STEAMER FAR WEST

The place or date of this photo is not known.
Print from Steamboat Photo Company, 121 River Avenue,
Sweickly, Pennsylvania. See appendix.

hostiles and location, and lack of inter-communication between units very nearly caused complete failure of the campaign. Therefore, the work of patrol and inter-communication among the units along the Yellowstone that the steamers were able to do, may safely be said to have contributed hugely to the final successful outcome of the summer's plans. The ferrying service, also, was not regarded lightly, for although the Indians seemed to be able to ford or swim the Yellowstone, the army troops and cavalry found it a long, laborious, and dangerous process without the aid of a steamer. During this one summer of 1876, the Far West served in all of the following capacities, at one time or another: ferry-boat, dispatch boat, patrol boat, gun boat, supply transport, hospital ship, and command headquarters for General Terry.

On the 15th of June the Far West left the Powder River for the Tongue, with Terry and his staff aboard. The mouth of that river was reached on the 16th, and there General Terry waited impatiently for news from Major Reno, whom he had sent scouting south of the Yellowstone. The news came on the 19th--a heavy Indian trail leading toward the Big Horn mountains had been found. Reno was returning to the mouth of the Rosebud. He was ordered to remain there, and Terry and the Far West reached that point early on the morning of the 21st of June. Then began a series of councils

on board the steamer, between Generals Terry, Custer, and Gibbon, in which the final details for the famous campaign were worked out.

Grant Marsh's vivid description of the tenseness and the quick activity of these preparations, as contained in Hanson's Conquest of the Missouri, and the concise army reports have proved invaluable in the preparation of this study of the steamboat in the army campaigns of 1876, but here is also the viewpoint of the scout, Le Forge, employed with Gibbon's forces:

The steamboat had come up again from Terry's base at the mouth of the Powder River, and it moved back and forth across the Yellowstone between our two camps here. I believe it merely transported the officers or afforded a meeting-place for them for their councils.⁴²

When Custer and gallant 7th Cavalry moved up the Rosebud on June 22nd, General Terry set off up the Yellowstone, accompanied by the supply steamer.

The steamer got away at 4 o'clock that day, and reached Fort Pease early on the morning of the 24th. My command. . . was, that evening, moved out to the crossing of Tullöck's Fork. It did not accompany it, and General Terry took command of the troops in person. The next day (June 25th) the steamer entered the mouth of the Big Horn and proceeded up that stream.⁴³

⁴²Marquis, op. cit., p. 242.

⁴³Gibbon, "Report of", "Report of the Secretary of War, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1876), p. 473.

For it was Terry's plan, and so he had assured Custer at their last meeting at the Rosebud, that the supply steamer was to be pushed up the Big Horn, "as far as the forks, if the river is found to be navigable for that distance."⁴⁴

The arrival of the Far West at the mouth of the Big Horn is also described by William H. White in his diary.⁴⁵ White was a private from Fort Ellis, with Colonel Gibbon's force.

Sat. June 24. Reveille 6 o'clock A.M. Steamboat arrived. Packed up and all the Cav. and 5 co. of Inf. crossed with packs. Terry and several officers with us camped on Telics (Tullock's Fork?) park.⁴⁶

Captain Marsh had had no previous intimation of the plan of the Generals to take supplies up the Big Horn by steamer, but without hesitation he went about getting ready, cut wood until noon on the 25th, then started. "Thanks to the zeal and energy displayed by Captain Grant Marsh, the master of the steamer, the mouth of the Little Horn was reached by her."⁴⁷

⁴⁴Terry, "Report of," Report of the Secretary of War, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1876), p. 462.

⁴⁵W. H. White, typewritten copy of a diary kept in 1876, in Montana State Historical Library.

⁴⁶Ibid., no page number.

⁴⁷Terry, op. cit., p. 465.

As a matter of fact, Captain Marsh reported that he actually steamed about twelve miles past the mouth of the Little Big Horn, because the army officer on board stubbornly insisted it was not the stream they were seeking.⁴⁸

Viewing the Big Horn River today, one is amazed to think that any kind of steamboat could once have proceeded as far as the Little Horn, to say nothing of having proceeded beyond. Of course, much water from both the Big Horn and Yellowstone Rivers is now being removed by irrigation, and the month of June, when this voyage was made, is usually the time of highest water. But even then it was a narrow, tortuous stream. It was constantly necessary to warp, a process involving the placing of lines ahead to a tree, and winding them up on the ship's capstan, thus dragging the boat slowly forward. Sometimes on the Big Horn, two lines were used, one fastened on each side of the river. There was scarcely any stretch of more than one hundred yards where steam alone was sufficient.

On the 27th of June, to the waiting personnel on board the Far West at the mouth of the Little Big Horn River, where Hardin now stands, came the first inkling of news to outsiders of the tragedy that had befallen General Custer and his men on the 25th. It came in the person of the ter-

⁴⁸Hanson, op. cit., p. 272.

rified Crow scout, Curley, who was so incoherent that it was only with great difficulty and the use of signs that the men on the steamboat were able to piece together parts of the chilling news. Instead of leaving in fright, however, Captain Marsh kept the Far West standing by for further orders. On the 28th Muggins Taylor, the messenger being sent by Gibbon to Fort Ellis, arrived, pursued by a small band of Indians, and the men on the steamboat learned the first real details of the defeat. In the evening, Terry's scouts located the vessel and returned on the 29th with instructions for Captain Marsh to prepare to take the wounded on board.

The story of the Custer plan of attack and defeat, and the survival of parts of Major Reno's and Captain Bentzen's forces has been told and retold, and discussed as perhaps not other one single Indian campaign in our history has, and it is not the purpose of this study to review the details of that struggle except insofar as river transportation played a part in the supply and movement of troops, and in evacuation of the wounded.

It was the 29th of June before the wounded survivors had been given emergency care, placed on litters devised from materials at hand by Lt. Gustavus C. Doane, slung between mules, and started toward the waiting steamer. The men suffered severely from the heat, thirst, and the slow, painful progress but, at 2:00 A.M., on the morning of the

30th, they were safely housed on board the boat. There had been fifty-nine wounded men when rescue came, but seven died on the field, so there were fifty-two wounded, plus the wounded horse, Comanche, comprising the Far West's cargo.

The entire main deck, usually used for cargo, open all around, had been covered with a layer of fresh grass and tarpaulins, and on this the wounded were placed.

At dawn the Far West backed carefully out from the bank, turned downstream, and began that wonderfully strange, record-breaking mission of mercy--probably the most skillful, though reckless, piece of navigation the Big Horn and Yellowstone were ever to see. It was fifty-three miles to the mouth, and this was covered by late afternoon.

The boat was forced to lie anxiously at the bank all through Saturday and Sunday, July 1st and 2nd, to ferry Gibbon and the remnants of troops to the north side of the Yellowstone. Terry, all available men, and fourteen of the wounded who had recovered sufficiently, remained here. The steamboat did not leave until 5 o'clock in the afternoon of July 3rd for Bismarck and Fort Lincoln, 700 miles away, but when once off, no stops were made, even at night--for marsh and his pilot, Campbell, worked off and on in four hour shifts--except to bury at the Powder Camp one of the wounded who died on the way.

Near Stanley's Stockade the Far West met the

Josephine, Matt Coulson, Captain, on her way up with supplies.

At 11 o'clock, P.M. July 5th, the Far West touched at Bismarck, fifty-four hours from the mouth of the Big Horn, and the first real news of the disaster at the Little Big Horn was flashed by telegraph to the world.⁴⁹

The Far West then proceeded to Fort A. Lincoln with the wounded, and brought the bitter news to the widows and survivors there. She left Bismarck again on the 9th of July with supplies and sixty cavalry horses as remounts, and reached the Big Horn on the 25th.

Permanent camp was being moved to the mouth of the Rosebud. Movements were afoot to prosecute the campaign to a successful conclusion despite the setback. General Crooks was ordered to join forces, and Colonel Miles, among others, was being sent to Montana.

The Far West was ordered down to the Powder River depot to bring up a pile of forage (grain), that had been left there. The steamer Carroll arrived at the Rosebud on August 1st, the day the Far West left, carrying Colonel Otis, and six companies of the 5th Infantry, indicating the gathering forces.

⁴⁹Hanson, op. cit., p. 309. Hanson builds a good case for the Far West being credited with carrying the first official and reliable news of the battle.

The Far West found the forage, seventy-five tons of it, piled on the ground, but the sacks had been removed by the Indians. A guard of soldiers was along, but the Indians attacked, and were kept at bay by a small cannon which the boat carried, while the work of loading was completed, and the return voyage begun.

All during August the Far West carried on patrol duty between small detachments Colonel Miles placed along the north bank of the Yellowstone to prevent escape of the hostiles to Canada.

Following the disaster on the Little Big Horn, General Sheridan had again recommended the establishment of two military posts in the Yellowstone country, one at the mouth of the Tongue River, and another on the Big Horn, stating that if there had been posts there, there would have been no war.⁵⁰

Congress at last passed a bill, late in the session, July 22, 1876, authorizing the construction of two such posts, and materials were collected as rapidly as possible.

but the season had now become so far advanced that it was found impracticable to get this material up the Yellowstone River on account of low water; and the building of them was consequently deferred until next spring.⁵¹

⁵⁰Sheridan, "Report of", Report of the Secretary of War, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1876), p. 442.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 445.

A temporary cantonment, however, was started at Tongue River. General Terry reported that on the 26th of August three steamers were stalled at the Wolf Rapids, just below the mouth of the Powder River, loaded with supplies.

I directed Colonel Whistler to proceed on his steamer (the Josephine) to Tongue River and commence building huts. The water was very low on the rapids, but the Josephine ascended them and proceeded.⁵²

The masters of the two other steamers refused to go on because of low water. Their freight was unloaded, hauled around the rapids, and transferred to the Far West, still in the upper river.

By the end of August, with the water lower than expected, the Far West, too, had gone down to Fort Buford, one boatload of supplies for the Tongue River encampment was docked at Glendive Creek, unable to go farther, and three more were aground eighteen miles below. Wagon supply now had to take over until the next May. All forces in the field except a holding force at Tongue River and General Miles' troops were taken out by boat from Glendive. General Miles was left to carry on the now famous winter campaign against the Sioux that finally completely disorganized them, starved them, harassed them into submission.

⁵²Terry, op. cit., p. 468.

The failure of steamboats to get above Wolf Rapids that Fall of 1876 was a bitter disappointment to the supporters of the military posts on the Yellowstone, and those citizens interested in the development of the valley. The army lost confidence in the Yellowstone as a line of supply for the proposed posts, except for the three months of June to August,⁵³ and resorted to land supply, which was very hazardous and over terrible terrain. The Indian attacks on wagon trains transporting the supplies from Glendive to the new cantonment in the Fall of 1876--notably the one on Lt. Col. Otis' train on October 11th--are evidence of the difficulties of land supply.

However, the steamers Far West and Josephine had done yeoman service all summer and early fall, until the 1st of September, and even after other boats were forced out of the river by low water, indicating that many of the boats placed in the river by the contractors for transportation were very ill-adapted to that special type of navigation to be found there.

Despite the short season for steamboating, the year 1877 was a busy one on the Yellowstone. Early in the spring supplies were dispatched by boat, chiefly from Bismarck, for the building of the two new posts: Fort Custer at the

⁵³Ibid., p. 487.

junction of the Little Big Horn and the Big Horn Rivers, and Fort Keogh, at the mouth of the Tongue River, where the cantonment had been established the preceding fall.

Lt. Col. G. P. Buell left Bismarck May 15th, 1877, with two companies of Quartermaster troops and one hundred mechanics on the board the Florence Meyer. Major Bartlett and Captain Schwan, each with two companies, were to follow on the Dugan⁵⁴ and Rankin.

Leeson reported twenty-four different steamboats on the Yellowstone in 1877,⁵⁵ and several of these made more than one trip in the season. Some proceeded even above the mouth of the Big Horn River, and evidently carried other than military supplies and passengers, as indicated by the following report:

We find that in 1877 no less than fourteen steamboats ascended the river above the mouth of the Big Horn. These brought freight and passengers destined for Bozeman and points further west, and from the head of navigation the freight was hauled by wagons up the river to its destination.⁵⁶

Lt. Col. Buell found the Florence Meyer unable to stem the Yellowstone's current beyond Big Porcupine Creek,

⁵⁴It is doubtful that the Dugan reached the Yellowstone. Leeson does not report that vessel, and Col. Buell mentioned a report the Dugan was disabled, but did not say where.

⁵⁵Leeson, op.cit., p. 398.

⁵⁶An Illustrated History, p. 268.

which he reached on June 14th, and there she blew out a cylinder head. Buell therefore went on to the site of the new post on the Big Horn by wagon, being ferried across the Yellowstone by mackinaw boats.⁵⁷

On July 7, the steamer Fletcher, with Company G, Eleventh Infantry, my sawmill, and some 50 tons of supplies reached the landing at Ft. Custer being the first boat up the Bighorn this year.⁵⁸

However, the Josephine had already made a trip to Fort Keogh (Tongue River), having arrived there May 23rd, 1877, and the steamer Fanchon arrived later on the same day, bringing troops and supplies.⁵⁹

A soldier on board the Josephine has described his trip up the Yellowstone:

In the early spring of 1877 we were ordered to Montana to establish Forts Keogh and Custer. We started up the Yellowstone river on the Josephine a little before the June Rise, which necessitated the men of our command hauling the steamer over the rapids when it was unable to go under its own power. We also supplied the boat with its necessary dry fuel enroute.

. . . We arrived at what was afterwards to be known at "Terry's Landing," which was directly opposite the point later known as "Junction," and at which place we afterwards unloaded many steamboats bringing supplies which were later hauled

⁵⁷Miles, "Report of," Report of the Secretary of War, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1877), p. 550.

⁵⁸Loc. cit.

⁵⁹"Log of Activities at Tongue River Cantonment," Report of the Secretary of War, 1877, p. 543.

by teams to Fort Custer forty miles further south.⁶⁰

As indication of the extent of the traffic on the Yellowstone in the year 1877, the following excerpts from the log kept by the commandant at the Tongue River Cantonment are given:

May, 1877

. . . steamer Josephine had returned to Glendive since May 23. Arrived back at Tongue River May 27.

June 9, 1877

Lt. Col. Geo. P. Buell. . . arrived, per steamer Florence Meyer, en route to build Post No. 2 on the Bighorn River.

June 12, 1877

Sergeant Kraeger, Co. G. 5th Infantry, returned by mackinaw boat from up the Yellowstone, bringing with him from Ft. Ellis five prisoners, charged with being deserters.

June 15, 1877

. . . steamer Ashland arrived.

June 16, 1877

Steamer Ashland transported troops to mouth of Powder River.

June 20, 1877

Later in the day Col. Sheridan passed up the river on the steamer Fletcher.

June 23, 1877

Corporal Miller and 14 enlisted men dispatched by mackinaw boat to the assistance of the steamer Osceola, wrecked below the mouth of the Powder River.

⁶⁰H. A. Frith, "Some Army Experiences of Henry A. Frith," Montana Monographs, edited by I. D. O'Donnell, 1928-29. A typewritten loose-leaf notebook collection, 2 Vols., in Parmly Billings Memorial Library, Billings, Montana, no page numbers.

June 25, 1877

Captain Heintzelman, A.Q.M., charged with the construction of the new post at this place, reached here, with 200 mechanics, per steamer Rankin.

June 26, 1877

Steamer Kate Kinney arrived, having on board Capt. Jos. Conrad and Co. B. Eleventh Infantry, who had to go into camp near cantonment for want of a boat to carry them up to the Bighorn River.

June 29, 1877

Steamer Ashland reached the cantonment, having on board Colonel Miles.

July 2, 1877

Captain Conrad, together with Company B, Eleventh Infantry. . . took their departure for the Bighorn on the steamer Savannah.

July 7, 1877

Corporal Miller and guard of 14 men. . . returned today, per steamer General Meade, from the wreck of the Osceola.

July 8, 1877

The steamer Fletcher arrived today from the Bighorn River.

July 11, 1877

The government steamer General Sherman arrived. The Far West departed the same day with Paymaster for troops in the Bighorn region.

July 16, 1877

Steamer Rosebud arrived about 4 o'clock with General Sherman, General Terry aboard.⁶¹

And thus the record of arrivals and departures continues on through July and the month of August, with a total of sixteen different steamboats mentioned, some having made

⁶¹ "Log of Activities at Tongue River Cantonment," Report of the Secretary of War, 1877, pp. 543-546.

more than one trip, as compared to twenty-four listed by Leeson, although the Tongue River Cantonment Log lists three--the Ashland, the Kate Kinney, and Key West--that are not reported by Leeson. The Quartermaster Report written October 10th, 1877, stated that there had been nineteen vessels of different kinds employed by ^{the} U.S. Army, ". . . by charter and otherwise, as the necessities of the service required during the year, at an expense of \$103,597.16."⁶² However, this figure referred to use of boats on the upper Missouri and the Yellowstone, both, and does not include civilian boats.

Of these boats, two--the Sherman and the Cameron--were purchased outright by the government, for the upper Missouri early in 1877, costing \$19,394 each, including furniture.⁶³ They were twin stern-wheel boats of 145 foot length and 236.7 tons, two high-pressure engines, and two steel boilers.

Unfortunately, the Cameron was wrecked on a snag on her first trip up the Missouri. The Sherman, however, did good service on the Yellowstone and Big Horn Rivers, although General Sherman himself described his namesake in these

⁶²Henry C. Hodges, "Report of the Quartermaster General," Report of the Secretary of War, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1877), p. 287.

⁶³Ibid., p. 181.

terms: "We found at the post (Fort Custer) the United States steamboat General Sherman, which has a good hull, a good engine, but too much and too fine a cabin for this work."⁶⁴

However, the greater part of the government transportation on the Yellowstone, as on the Missouri, was done under contract with steamboat owners. It was, for the most part, satisfactory, though costly.

Much of the activity during the summer of 1877, both on the river and at the two new posts, was due to the tours of inspection of Generals Sheridan and Sherman. The former came overland from Salt Lake City, through Dillon and Fort Ellis to Fort Custer, and from there downstream by boat, while General Sherman and party boarded the steamboat Rosebud at Bismarck, with Captain Grant Marsh as captain, on July 9th, for the run to Fort Custer, from which place they were to continue westward overland.

The Rosebud reached Fort Buford in three days after leaving Bismarck, and at daybreak of the 13th of July entered the Yellowstone. "The channels of the river were good, but the currents were swifter than in the Missouri and our

⁶⁴Gen. P. H. Sheridan and Gen. W. T. Sherman, Reports of Inspection Made in the Summer of 1877, printed by order of the Secretary of War, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1878), p. 29.

progress correspondingly slower."⁶⁵ However, by steamboatmen's estimate, they made about eighty miles.

General Sherman reported that an attempt was being made by the Quartermaster's and the Engineer's departments to improve the channel in Wolf Rapids.⁶⁶

On July 21st the Rosebud passed old Fort Pease, just below the mouth of the Big Horn, and there encountered rapids that required the aid of ropes and men to navigate. The first eighteen miles of the Big Horn, in which distance they met two different steamers bound downstream (one with Generals Sheridan and Crooks aboard), offered no serious navigational difficulties. But the rest of the way was navigated only with great difficulty, causing General Sherman to state that the post, Fort Custer, could not depend on the Big Horn River for supply. Steamboats "have been sometimes two weeks in warping up the Bighorn, and have left their loads strung along its banks at points hard to reach with wagons."⁶⁷

General Sheridan's comment was only in praise of the location and work at Fort Custer.

We found Post No. 2 delightfully located by Lieutenant Colonel Buell, who was working as busy as a beaver in its erection. Five steamers com-

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 62.

⁶⁶Loc. cit.,

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 30.

ing up the Bighorn were in sight, and were soon at the landing. After one days' rest at the post we embarked in one of the steamers and proceeded down the Bighorn and Yellowstone to Post No. 1, at the mouth of Tongue River, arriving the next day.⁶⁸

Mrs. Alice Blackwood Baldwin, wife of an army officer assigned to Fort Keogh, has recorded some comments on a steamboat trip to that post in the spring of 1877, on the Silver City, "a comfortable boat with ample staterooms and was clean and convenient."⁶⁹

There were other officer families aboard, as well as professional gamblers, a variety troupe, and a paymaster for the soldiers, who was constantly fearful of an attack by road agents.

Life on board the Silver City was quiet and uneventful, save for stops along the river at various landing places to "wood up."⁷⁰

Edward A. Dunne is another who has left a memoir account of steamboating days on the Yellowstone.⁷¹ He was a soldier in 1877, transported by steamer to Fort Keogh, when the post was being built.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 5.

⁶⁹A. B. Baldwin, Memoirs of the Late Frank D. Baldwin, Major General, U.S.A., edited by Brown, Smith, and Brininstool, (Los Angeles: Wetzel Publishing Co., Inc. 1929), p. 182.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 184.

⁷¹"Memoirs of Edward W. Dunne," Montana Monographs, no page numbers.

Later, at Terry's Landing, at the mouth of the Big Horn, he assisted in unloading of steamers, and still later he was at Coulson, evidently as a civilian again, working for Hoskins and McGirl.

There were sixteen boats a year that came up the river with merchandise and took back hides and furs. The government shipped up two years supplies for the Crow Indians, who then had an Agency at Absarokee. When the boat unloaded the banks of the Yellowstone were covered with merchandise for great distances.⁷²

It was also during 1877 that A. G. LaBarge, a member of the famous LaBarge family of river pilots,⁷³ undertook to provide a guide for Yellowstone pilots. The following excerpts from the manuscript give some idea of the crude methods of navigation employed, but also an idea of how minutely the pilot had to know his river and natural features.

Run up the right hand bend (prairie) past the first creek, (which is the Willow) keep up to the upper dry bar.

Then cross over to the left hand timber point (Plenty of Ash and Cottonwood in this bend) Run up to the left hand dry bar.⁷⁴

Although indications of the number of vessels on the Yellowstone in the year 1878 vary, it appeared to be the

⁷²Loc. cit.

⁷³A. G. LaBarge was evidently either son or nephew of Joseph LaBarge, Jr. though it is not clear which. There are five different LaBarges listed as steamboat owners, captains, and pilots on the Missouri River in 1868.

⁷⁴A. G. LaBarge, Yellowstone Guide from the mouth to Big Horn River for the Guidance of Pilots, 1877. The original manuscript copy is in the Montana State Historical Library.

peak year in the use of that river for navigation.

Leeson⁷⁵ reported fifty-four steamboat arrivals at Miles City, or Milestown as it was then called, and was apparently quoting newspaper accounts, for the Miles City Daily Star, in a Golden Jubilee Edition, May 24, 1934, contains a reprint of an 1878 item concerning steamboating which used the same figure.

The steamboat business is a very important factor in the commercial prospect of the town (Milestown). The number of boats arriving from Bismarck and other points on the river below during the season was fifty-four. The first to arrive was the Gen. Sherman, May 17th, and the last was the F. Y. Batchelor, September 6th.⁷⁶

The latter boat became a familiar sight on the Yellowstone and Big Horn Rivers from 1878 to 1882. She was built for the Leighton and Jordan trading company by Charles W. Batchelor early in 1878, and named for one of his brothers. On her maiden voyage up the Missouri and Yellowstone in June of 1878, with Grant Marsh as Captain, Charles W. Batchelor, himself a famous Ohio River pilot and master, accompanied her. Also on board was another brother, S. J. Batchelor, serving as clerk, who kept a log of the trip. Some excerpts follow:

June 20--Weather clear and warm. Arrived at Fort Buford, mouth of the Yellowstone, at 8 A.M. Discharged

⁷⁵Leeson, op. cit., p. 406.

⁷⁶Miles City Daily Star, May 24, 1934, Sect. 1, p. 17.

considerable freight, and left at 2 P.M. Entered the Yellowstone River at 2:20 P.M. Laid up for the night at Table Rock, forty-five miles above Buford.

June 21--Weather clear and very hot. River rising and current very strong. Met steamer Katie P. Kounts...

June 24--Arrived at Miles City at 8 A.M. Discharged thirty-five tons of freight, and left at 4 P.M. The General Rucker overtook us at this place and started out a few minutes ahead. We passed her and beat her to Fort Keogh forty minutes (distance, ten miles), arriving there at 5:30 P.M.⁷⁷

The F.Y. Batchelor went on on the 25th, and entered the Big Horn River at 8 P.M. of the 26th.

The Big Horn River is one of the most rapid and tortuous rivers that has ever been navigated by a steamboat. The current is terrific, and at places it seems impossible for any boat to steam it.⁷⁸

The F. Y. Batchelor arrived at Fort Custer on June 28th, the first boat up that season. The party on board was escorted around the Custer battlefield by General Miles, and left again on the 29th. The vessel made record runs to Fort Keogh, Buford, and Bismarck, having been absent from the latter point only seventeen days.

The Bozeman, Montana, Avant Courier listed twenty-four arrivals at Miles City up to July 12th, 1878.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Charles W. Batchelor, Incidents in My Life, (Pittsburgh: Jos. Eichbaum and Company, 1887), pp. 100-104.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 102.

⁷⁹ Helen Braun, A History in Items of the Garden Spot of the Yellowstone, in ten volumes, typewritten and bound 1942, citing from the Bozeman Avant Courier, August 1, 1878, no page numbers.

Although the bulk of the freight was destined for Miles City and Fort Keogh, there continued to be steady military traffic up the Big Horn to Fort Custer, and considerable freight and passengers for Bozeman.

In 1878 nine steamers plied the waters of the Yellowstone in a total of fifteen trips, as high up as Sherman (Big Horn City, three miles below the mouth of the Big Horn), and some of these went up as high as Terry's Landing (or Big Horn Junction, Junction City), and one to Camp Bertie, near Pompey's Pillar. The arrival of these boats made business for the freighters, hauling up the valley to Bozeman, and for the stage lines.⁸⁰

Mrs. Sarah Thompson, in 1878, kept a stage station where Hardin now stands, and has recalled that:

Our main supplies came up on the boat "Batchelor." They unloaded in front of our door. The boat brought all government supplies. It was an exciting day when the boat arrived as all the people would drop whatever they were doing to see it unload. Often piles of bacon that stacked twenty feet high would be taken off the boat and piled on the ground, also hams.⁸¹

The breakdown of private and government imports via the Yellowstone River in 1878, as given by Leeson, is as follows:

300 tons of private freight to Bozeman.
 300 tons of private freight to Ft. Custer.
 700 tons of private freight to Miles City.
 12,000 tons of government freight to Fts. Custer and Keogh.⁸²

⁸⁰An Illustrated History, p. 271.

⁸¹"Memoirs of Mrs. Sarah Thompson"; "Montana Monographs", no page numbers.

⁸²Leeson, op. cit., p. 406.

In 1879 only nine steamers--the Western, Batchelor, Terry, Benton, Rosebud, Big Horn, Helena, Gen. Rucker, and the Yellowstone--were reported on the Yellowstone by Leeson,⁸³ but four others--the Gen. Sherman, Nellie Peck, Black Hills, and Gen. Custer--were listed among the arrivals at Miles City during 1879, up to July 22nd.⁸⁴

It was during this year that the Yellowstone was wrecked on Buffalo Rapids, and efforts of the government to improve the channel were renewed more vigorously.

A complete survey of the Yellowstone River had been commenced September 6th, 1878, under provisions of a River and Harbor Act of June 18th, 1878. During the next two years 256 miles of river had been surveyed, maps made, and . . . issued to the various steamboats navigating the Yellowstone. They have proved of great service to them as well as to the Northern Pacific Railroad Company."⁸⁵

An Act of March 3rd, 1879 appropriated \$25,000 for improvement of the channel, and work actually began at Buffalo Rapids on September 5th, 1879. In addition to work

⁸³Ibid., p. 405.

⁸⁴The Miles City Yellowstone Journal, July 24, 1879, p. 3.

⁸⁵"Report of the Chief of Engineers," Report of the Secretary of War, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880), p. 170.

there, obstructions were removed at Baker's Rapids, and at Wolf Rapids.

Up to July 1st, 1880, the amount of money available for river improvement was reported to be \$29,423, and the amount spent \$10,403.⁸⁶

There were several steamboat lines operating on the rivers of Montana and Dakota during this period. One was the Charles and Wilder Line, and another, probably the best known, was the Coulson Packet Company, which operated nine steamers in 1879. It had a branch office at Bismarck under the management of Captain D. W. Maratta. Captain Grant Marsh was, of course, its most famous pilot, and his name will always be thought of whenever steamboats on the Yellowstone are mentioned.

The Rosebud was the fastest of the Coulson boats, having, in 1879, made the run from Bismarck to Fort Keogh in five days and eighteen hours, a trip which usually required four or or five days from Bismarck to Buford, and an additional six days to Fort Keogh, because of the frequent rapids. Travel was usually by day only, unless there was bright moonlight.

At first traffic and freight was largely one-way, as the boats came up with supplies and soldiers, and returned

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 1475.

empty, but as the civilian population grew, traffic began to develop both ways.

For example, on a typical voyage of the Batchelor, Grant Marsh, Captain, first up in the spring of 1880, and eighteen days out of Bismarck, there were forty-three cabin passengers, 125 soldiers for Fort Keogh, and 260 tons of freight for town and post. On her return journey, the vessel was loaded with buffalo hides for Bismarck.⁸⁷

Charles Strevell made the trip to Miles City on the F. Y. Batchelor in 1879, and the next year his equipment for setting up a hardware store came up with the same boat.

All the merchandise which reached the Yellowstone Valley was brought by steamer during the "June Rise" or high water period in the Yellowstone, which lasted from six to eight weeks. After that time, practically no goods were brought into the country until the same time the following year.⁸⁸

The Batchelor, under Captain Grant Marsh, between April 8th and July 22nd, had traveled 9,910 miles between Sioux City, Iowa, Fort Custer, and Huntley, Montana, having made several trips, and bringing in a total of 1,188 tons of freight.⁸⁹

The government contract boats were usually paid \$300.

⁸⁷The Yellowstone Journal, May 29, 1880, p. 3.

⁸⁸C. N. Strevell, As I Recall Them, p. 54, no publication dates, no publisher. In collection of Miles City Public Library.

⁸⁹Yellowstone Journal, July 31, 1879, p. 2.

per day while under contract,⁹⁰ netting, in most cases, a nice profit for their owners. In contrast, the government-owned General Sherman cost in one year for repairs \$2,206, and for running expenses \$23,919, which must have been considerably cheaper.⁹¹

Several personal memoir accounts of the steamboat traffic in 1879, and 1880, have been obtained.

Mrs. V. J. Salsbury tells of seeing five boats loading buffalo hides at one time at Miles City,⁹² and C. N. Strevell noted that

. . . there were great piles of buffalo hides along the river bank awaiting the arrival of the steamers. That summer (1879 or 1880) the shipments from the Yellowstone Valley amounted to 250,000 hides.⁹³

Lou Nutting, of Laurel, Montana, also recalls the huge piles of hides stretching for miles along the river bank of Miles City in 1881, awaiting transportation.⁹⁴

⁹⁰"Report of the Quartermaster General," Report of The Secretary of War, 1880, p. 440.

⁹¹Ibid., p. 441

⁹²V. J. Salsbury, "Memoirs of," Montana Monographs.

⁹³Strevell, op. cit., p.55.

⁹⁴Interview with Mr. Nutting, who is now well over ninety years of age, and was an early-day mule-skinner, hunter, and settler.

Leeson reported nine different steamers on the Yellowstone in 1880, and a drop in freight tonnage.⁹⁵ However, the next year, in spite of the approaching railroad, freight brought up the Yellowstone swelled to 8,420,000 pounds, with seven boats serving the area.⁹⁶

It is estimated by competent authorities that one hundred thousand buffalo hides will be shipped out of the Yellowstone country this season. Two firms alone are negotiating for the transportation of twenty-five thousand hides each. . . Most of our citizens saw the big load of buffalo hides that the C. W. Peck brought down last season, a load that hid everything about the boat below the roof of the urricane deck. How such a load could have been piled on the Terry the hides had been brought out of the Yellowstone by the Terry not even the men on the boat know. It hid every part of the boat, barring only the pilot-house and smoke-stacks. . . For such boats as ply the Yellowstone, there are at least fifteen full loads of buffalo hides and other pelts.⁹⁷

Captain Grant Marsh had severed his connections with the Coulson Packet Company in the fall of 1877, and shortly thereafter he had entered into a contract with Leighton and Jordan, traders for the posts at Buford and Keogh. He took over command of their steamer, the F.Y. Batchelor, and handled her in both private freighting and government contract work for several years, on both the Missouri and Yellowstone.

⁹⁵Leeson, op. cit., p. 405.

⁹⁶Loc. cit.

⁹⁷Sioux City, Iowa, Journal, May 1881, quoted in M. G. Burlingame, "The Buffalo in Trade and Commerce," North Dakota Historical Quarterly, Vol. 3, #4, July, 1929, p. 279.

In 1881 Marsh operated the new Leighton and Jordan steamer Eclipse between Bismarck and Fort Keogh. Along with the steamers General Terry, Josephine, Black Hills, and Batchelor, she was engaged by the government to transport to the lower reservations some 3,000 Indians that General Miles had collected and was holding near Fort Keogh.

In the late fall of 1881 the Batchelor, again on government service, was caught by the winter freeze at Milk River, on the upper Missouri. The next spring, as soon as she was released, Grant Marsh took her down to Buford, then up the Yellowstone to Fort Keogh for a cargo of furs at Leighton and Jordan's trading post. This proved to be one of the wealthiest fur cargoes ever carried down the Missouri. It was made up of beaver, otter, wolf pelts, and buffalo hides, and was valued at \$106,000.⁹⁸

By the year 1882, however, the Northern Pacific Railroad had tapped the Yellowstone Valley, and the day of steamboat navigation of the Yellowstone as an important factor in the economy of the region and of Montana was about at an end.

The few remaining instances of its use, and attempts to revive the trade, will be discussed in the next and final Chapter.

⁹⁸Hanson, op. cit., p. 411.

FIGURE VI.
MAP OF THE YELLOWSTONE REGION

CHAPTER V

ATTEMPTS TO REVIVE THE TRADE AND CONCLUSIONS

I saw in the valley of the Yellowstone the last of the buffalo, the last of the wild free Indians, the last of "The Great West that Was."¹

The building of the Northern Pacific Railroad, which eventually meant the end of steamboating on the Yellowstone, did provide a temporary flurry of business for steamboats. The Eclipse made one trip, the General Terry one trip, and the Batchelor four short trips in 1882, hauling a total of some 1,390,000 pounds of freight, all for the railroad work. However, government freight was falling off. The U.S. steamer General Sherman brought in some 1,400,000 pounds, but was the only boat reported doing government work that year.²

Traffic on the Yellowstone thereafter was confined to that section of the river between Glendive and its mouth. Some optimists had hoped that a healthy competition would develop between steamers and the railroad and help to keep rail freight rates down. For example, the Army Engineers in 1879, using a continuation of the survey and improvement of the river, stated:

¹Granville Stuart, op. cit., p. 20.

²Leeson, op. cit., p. 405.

This road (the Northern Pacific) will of course detract somewhat from the value of the river, but a healthy competition will arise and result in a benefit to the people of Montana. The river will always receive its share of the freight, especially of the bulky class, and of such articles as do not demand an immediate market.³

However, the steamboat failed to compete above Glendive, and its passing was viewed nostalgically by many an old-timer.

Some of the results (of the coming of the railroad) were not quite so satisfactory, the most noticeable one being the absence of steamers on the Yellowstone. The arrival of the steamer, Bachelor, with the well-known sound of its whistle as it neared old Milestown will not soon be forgotten by those who were accustomed to have their goods arrive by steamer, or those who rushed to the landing. . . to witness the excitement.⁴

There were repeated attempts made to promote further improvement in the channel and to revive the trade on the Yellowstone. Between March 3, 1879, and June 3, 1896, a total of \$128,750 was appropriated by Congress for survey and improvement to Miles City, 187 miles from the mouth, and in 1896 some bank revetment was done at Glendive.⁵

Promotion was underway as late as 1911 to provide a four foot channel in the river as high as Billings, and a

³"Report of the Chief of Engineers," Report of the Secretary of War, 1879, p. 1101.

⁴Strevell, op. cit., p. 68.

⁵U.S. House Document #83, 62nd Congress, 1st Session, Reports on Examination and Survey of Yellowstone River from its mouth to Billings, p. 1.

lock in the government reclamation dam that had been built twenty miles below Glendive, but these were turned down as being unwarranted.⁶

In 1882 the old master-pilot of the Yellowstone-- Captain Grant Marsh--had deserted the Northwest, and had moved his family from Yankton to Memphis, Tennessee. From there he operated for twenty years as a Mississippi River pilot and master, but he never forgot the upper Missouri and Yellowstone country. So it was that when the flour mill king and ex-senator from Minnesota, General W. D. Washburn, began to develop considerable river trade in grain, lumber, and coal above Bismarck in 1902, and asked Marsh to come up and take over one of his steamers, Marsh needed little urging.

In 1904, Washburn sold out to the Benton Packet Company, and Marsh continued in its employ. In 1905, he served the United States government in a survey of the Yellowstone River to Glendive on the snag-boat Mandan, for the purpose of checking the channel for possible steamer supply of the big reclamation dam to be built. He reported the river perfectly navigable and, in 1906 he was captain of the Benton steam Expansion, chartered by the government, carrying cement and supplies from Glendive and from Mondak, near

⁶Ibid., p. 2.

FIGURE VII

THE STEAMER EXPANSION

Print from Steamboat Photo Company, 121 River Avenue, Sewickley, Pennsylvania. See appendix.

the mouth of the Yellowstone, to the damsite.

Here, in 1906, one of the last glimpses of Captain Grant Marsh, busy at the work he loved, was reported by John G. Neihart, a young adventurer who was making a canoe trip from Fort Benton to St. Louis. At Mondak landing, two miles above the mouth of the Yellowstone, he met Captain Marsh and the steamboat Expansion, freighting supplies up to the dam. Anxious to make further acquaintance with the old riverman, Neihart signed on as a deckhand to make a trip.

We had a heavy cargo, ranging from lumber and tiling to flour and beer, and there are no docks on the Yellowstone. The banks were steep, the sun very hot, and the cargo had to be landed by man power.⁷

By this time steamboats had been equipped to burn coal as fuel, and stops were made twice on this trip to "coal" from the veins along the river bank. This was the same coal that in the earlier days of steamboating had defied every effort of the steamboatmen to make it burn.

There also, in 1907 and 1908, Grant Marsh was seen and mentioned briefly by another writer.⁸ He was still hauling cement and supplies on the river below Glendive, and "a large number of passengers who wanted to go farther down

⁷John G. Neihart, The River and I, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1927), p. 161.

⁸Eliot Paul, Ghost Town on the Yellowstone, (New York: Random House, 1948).

the valley."⁹

In 1910 Grant Marsh retired permanently from the river, and died in 1916 at Bismarck, North Dakota. Steam navigation of the Yellowstone River is bound closely with the life of this skilled river pilot and master. He served as mate on one of the vessels supplying the Sully expedition in 1864, the first year steamboats appeared on the Yellowstone. Because of his reputation for skill and daring, on nearly every surveying expedition and escort on the Yellowstone the army stipulated that his services were desired. No other master knew the Yellowstone and Upper Missouri Rivers as did Grant Marsh. He had sailed to within sound of the falls on the Missouri, and to the extreme limits of steamboat navigation on the Yellowstone and Big Horn Rivers. Although he was away from the area of his greatest feats for twenty years, he returned to work out the remainder of his useful life on the river he loved, until the trade had almost completely vanished.

An Army engineer report of 1911 on the proposal to maintain a four-foot stage of water in the Yellowstone, and to build a lock at the government dam, contains a feview of the then existing commerce on the Yellowstone. Some excerpts

⁹Ibid., p. 185.

from that report follow:

Mondak. This town is on the Missouri River, 2 miles above the mouth of the Yellowstone, and is a natural harbor for the Yellowstone trade. Railroad close to river. Freight taken up by boat in summer and by teams in winter. Boat now building for trade in Yellowstone. Steamer O.K. was used 1906-07. There is desire to ship lumber, grain, and general merchandise.

The Benton Packet Co. moved 2,400 tons in 1906, 1,500 tons in 1907, 1,800 tons in 1908. In the early part of 1909, before closing the government dam, they also handled 2,000 tons with one boat, the Expansion. In 1910 they did not operate, partly because they needed their boats elsewhere on the Missouri River, and partly because of the obstruction of the irrigation dam.

A boat line known as the Missouri River Navigation Co., operated by Capt. Seneschal, of Pierre, S. Dak., in the Yellowstone River below the dam, both in 1909 and 1910. The boats used were the City of Mondak and the City of Pierre, and they carried each year approximately 1,000 to 2,000 tons, connecting with the towns of Buford and Mondak at the mouth of the river. Lignite coal is now hauled in limited quantities and will no doubt in future form a large element of commerce on the lower river.¹⁰

The negative recommendation on this report, however, rather effectively marked the end of any hope of reviving navigation on the Yellowstone above Glendive, and caused some consternation and protests from Chambers of Commerce from Glendive to Bozeman, but to no avail. The completion of the branch rail line from Mondak to Glendive then dealt the final death blow to navigation on even that one remaining

¹⁰U. S. House Document #83, op. cit., p. 9.

portion of the Yellowstone.

It should be clearly seen, then, from this survey of the navigational uses of the Yellowstone River from early exploring expeditions to the last commercial use of the river, that as an artery of travel and commerce it has made a far greater contribution to the discovery, progress, and economic development of Montana than is commonly realized. It first provided a route for exploring expeditions, then was a means of travel into the regions for the early fur-traders, and for floating down their great fortunes in pelts.

An extensive mackinaw and flatboat commerce developed in the 1860's and 1870's in spite of almost complete domination of the region by the Indians during those years.

It was a military supply, however, that the navigation of the Yellowstone made its greatest contribution, with most far-reaching effects on the Northwest.

Throughout the Indian Wars of the Missouri Valley the steamboat played a part of the very highest importance. It was almost the exclusive means of transporting men and supplies along the river, except when in active campaign work in the interior.¹¹

And probably in no place along the entire Missouri River system did this apply more accurately than in the Yellowstone region, where the red man made one of the most

¹¹Chittenden, Early Steamboating, Vol. 2, p. 382.

bitterly contested and best organized stands anywhere on the North American continent. The final successful clearing of the region, in which the steamboat made such a significant contribution, opened an entire rich new area for settlement and growth. River transportation then supplied the growing towns and farms with the necessities of commerce until the railroad tapped the territory.

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APPENDIX
STEAMBOATS USED ON THE YELLOWSTONE RIVER

Name	Owner, where known	Years on Yellowstone	End, where known
<u>Alone</u>		1864	
<u>Arkansas</u>		1877	
<u>Ashland</u>		1877	
<u>Bachelor</u>		1878	Sunk at Pierre, S. Dak., 1884
<u>Benton #2</u>		1876, -79	
<u>Big Horn #4</u>		1877, - 78, - 79, -80, -81	Sunk on Upper Missouri, 1883
<u>Black Hills</u>		1879, - 81	Sunk at Yankton, 1882
<u>Butte</u>		1878, -80	Burned at Fort Peck, 1883
<u>Carroll</u>		1876	Burned near Ft. Randall, 1877
<u>Chippewa Falls</u>	Idaho Steam Packet Co.	1864	
<u>City of Mondak</u>	Missouri River Navigation Co.	1909, -10	
<u>City of Pierre</u>	Missouri River Navigation Co.	1909, -10	
<u>Dakotah</u>	Todd, Coulson, Evans	1879	
<u>Eclipse</u>	Leighton & Jordan	1878, -81, -82	
<u>E. H. Durfee</u>	Coulson Packet Company	1876	Sunk at Lower Missouri, 1881.
<u>Expansion</u>	Benton Packet Company	1906, -07, -08	
<u>Fanchon</u>		1877	

Name	Owner, where known	Years on Yellowstone	End, where known
<u>Far West</u>	Coulson Packet Company	1873, -76, -77	Sunk in Lower Missouri 1883
<u>Florence Meyer</u>		1877	
<u>Fontannelle</u>		1877	
<u>F. Y. Batchelor</u>	Leighton and Jordan	1878, -79, -80 -81, -82	
<u>General Custer</u>		1877, -78, -79	Sunk in Nebraska, 1879
<u>General Meade</u>	Charles and Wilder	1877, -78	Sunk in Lower Missouri, 1888
<u>General Rucker</u>		1878, -79	
<u>General Sherman</u>	U. S. Government	1877, -78, -79, -82	
<u>General Terry</u>		1878, -79, -80, -81, -82 1878	Sunk in 1888
<u>Gen. Tompkins</u>			
<u>Helena</u>		1878, -79, -80, -81	Sunk in S. Dak., 1887
<u>James E. Rankin</u>		1877	Wrecked on the Yellowstone in 1877
<u>J. G. Fletcher</u>		1877	
<u>Josephine</u>	Coulson Packet Company	1873, -75, -76, -77, -80, -81 1877	Used by the government as a snag-boat until 1907
<u>Kate Kinney</u>			
<u>Katie P. Kountz</u>		1878	
<u>Kendall</u>		1877	

<u>Name</u>	<u>Owner, where known</u>	<u>Years on Yellowstone</u>	<u>End, where known</u>
<u>Key West</u>	Coulson Packet Company	1873, -77	
<u>Mandan</u>	U. S. Government	1905	
<u>Montana</u>		1879	Wrecked on Lower Missouri, 1884
<u>Nellie Peck</u>	Coulson Packet Company	1879, -80	
<u>Osceola</u>		1877, -78	Cabin blown off in Yellow- stone in 1878
<u>Peninah</u>		1873, -77, -78	Wrecked at Sioux City in 1879
<u>Rosebud</u>	Coulson Packet Company	1877, -78, -79, -80, -81	
<u>Savannah</u>		1877	
<u>Silver City</u>		1877	
<u>Silver Lake</u>		1876	
<u>Tidal Wave</u>		1877	
<u>Tiger</u>		1876, -77, -78	
<u>Victoria</u>		1877	
<u>Weaver</u>		1877	
<u>Westenn</u>		1877, -79, -80	
<u>Yellowstone #3</u>	Lamme & Story	1876, -77, -78, -79	Sunk in Buffalo Rapids in the Yellowstone 1879

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE

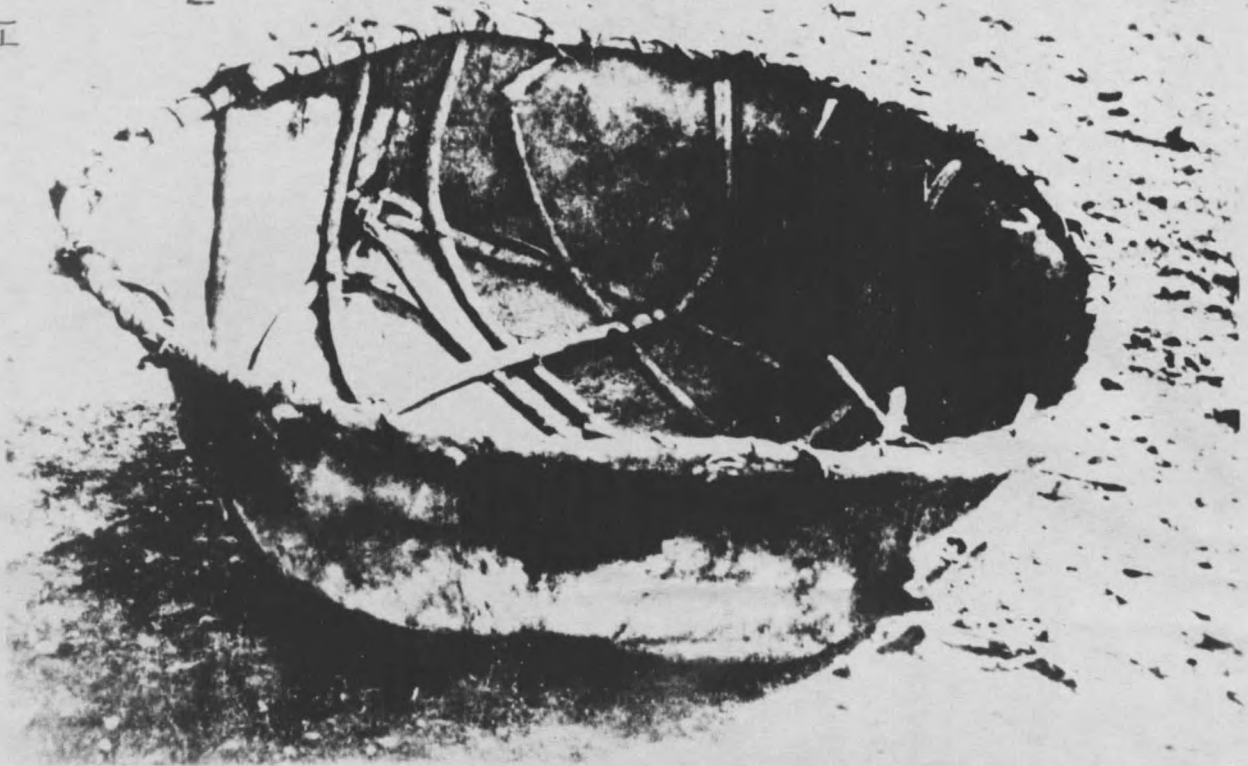
- I. An Indian Bull-boat
From a photo in Montana Historical Society
Collection
- II. An Artist's sketch of the Keel Boat
From Chappell, "History of the Missouri River,"
P. 261.
- III. Poster: Ho For The Yellowstone
Reproduced from a poster in the Montana His-
torical Library collection.
- IV. The Steamer Josephine
This photo was taken later in her career when she
was serving the U.S. Army Engineers as a snag-boat.
Print secured from Steamboat Photo Company, 121
River Avenue, Sewickley, Pennsylvania.
- V. The Steamer Far West
The place or date of this photo is not known.
Print from Steamboat Photo Company, 121 River
Avenue, Sewickley, Pennsylvania.
- VI. Map of the Yellowstone Region
- VII. The Steamer Expansion
Print from Steamboat Photo Company, 121 River
Avenue, Sewickley, Pennsylvania.

II

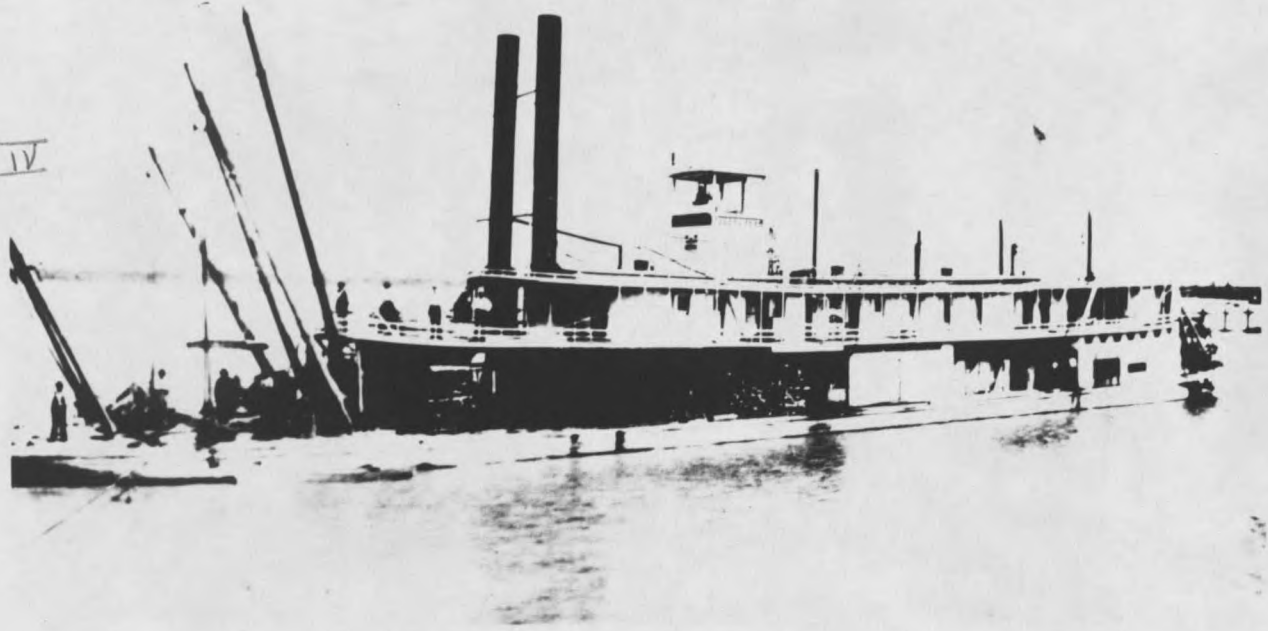


Keel-boat

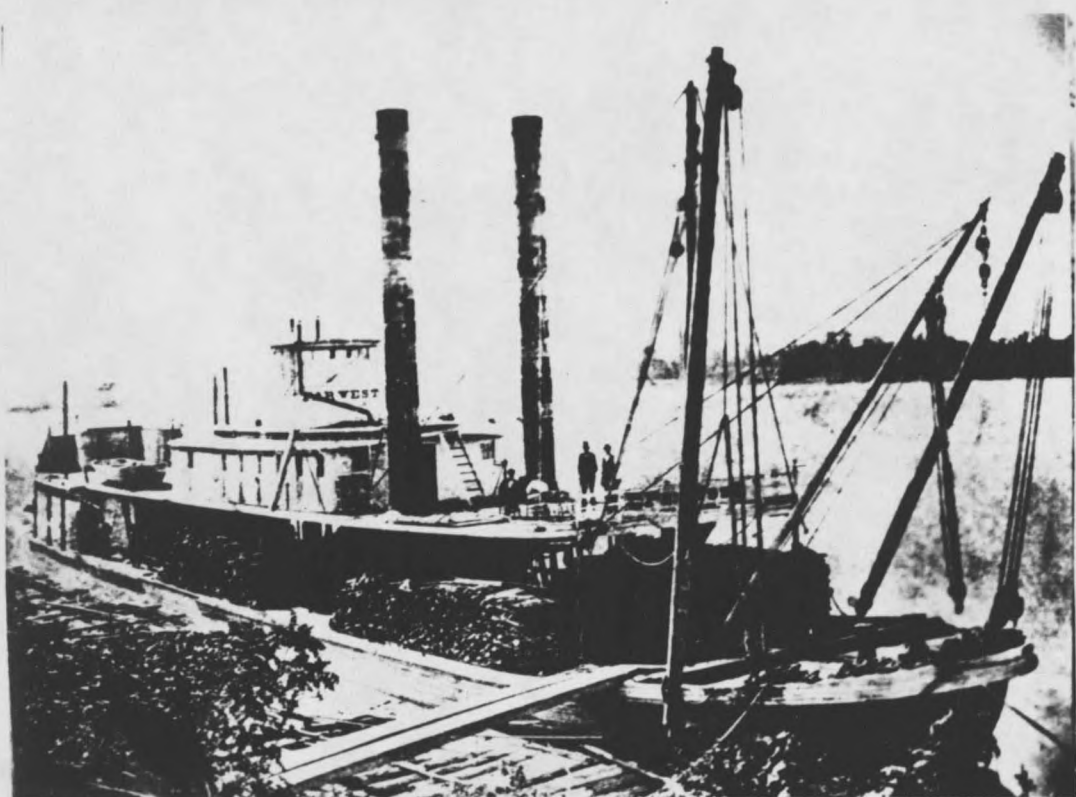
I



IV



V



HO FOR THE YELLOW STONE

AND  THE

GOLD MINES OF IDAHO!

A NEW AND VERY LIGHT DRAUGHT STEAMER WILL LEAVE

SAINT LOUIS FOR BIGHORN CITY!

THE JUNCTION OF BIGHORN AND YELLOW STONE RIVERS.

SATURDAY, APRIL 20, ¹⁸⁶⁴ AT 12 O'CLOCK M.

Parties taking this route save 400 miles river transportation and over 100 miles land transportation. Bighorn City being by a good wagon road from Virginia City 200 and from Bannack City 265 miles.

I WILL ALSO SEND TWO LIGHT DRAUGHT SIDE-WHEEL STEAMERS

TO FORT BENTON

One leaving at the same time, and the second about fifteen days later. I am prepared to contract for Freight and Passage either to Bighorn City or Fort Benton.

I refer to W. B. DAVY, JUN. STEWART and S. WALL, Virginia City, or to M. MANDEVILLE, Bannack City.

For Freight or Passage apply to **JOHN G. COPELIN,**
Care JOHN J. ROE & CO., St. Louis, Mo



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